

Enterprise ~ Log Entries 90



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IDIC



IDIC is a fan-run club with approximately 1200 members world-wide - roughly 100 live outside Britain, half of these in America. It is run by Janet Quarton, Sheila Clark and Valerie Piacentini, all of whom have been active in Star Trek fandom in Britain for many years - Janet and Sheila since 1974 and Valerie since 1976. Sheila and Valerie are also known as fan writers, although neither has written anything for some time.

The late Gene Roddenberry was an honorary member; and we have as honorary members several of the actors and production staff of Star Trek, including Majel Barrett, James Doohan, George Takei, Walter Koenig, Nichelle Nichols, Mark Lenard, Patrick Stewart, Marina Sirtis, John de Lancie, Siddig el Fadil, Michael Okuda and Rick Sternbach.

We put out a newsletter, usually of 100 pages, six times a year, in February, April, June, August, October and December. We say in each newsletter when the next one is due, and so far they have always been sent out on time.

We print news, views and reviews in the newsletter. We cover everything from The Cage, through Classic Trek and the movies to The Next Generation, Deep Space 9, and beyond.

We try to keep a balance between the three series, although of course DS9 has not yet been seen in Britain.

We welcome member participation. The Postbag, at 30 - 35 pages long, is a forum for (polite) discussion on anything arising from star Trek. Articles on any aspect of Trek are most welcome, as are book and (especially) zine reviews. All we ask is that the material you send is original - ie has not been printed anywhere else.

One of our activities is the support of Guide Dogs for the Blind. We have used stamps and ask members to send in any that they can (these are sold to dealers); we also do some fund-raising, both through the newsletters and at conventions; so far we have sponsored 4 dogs, and are saving for the fifth. Venus, Aero and Lindsay have all qualified and are now working; Sadie is still in training.

Dues for one year (6 newsletters) are, as of August 1993, U.K. £7.50; USA/Middle East £13.25 (USA \$23); Europe £9.50; Australia/Japan £14.50. Payment (in sterling) can be by cash (your risk, but paper money or British stamps only please), cheque (we can take bank drafts or personal cheques in dollars from America only) or Visa/Mastercard. Enquiries about the club should be sent to Janet Quarton, 15 Letter Daill, Cairnbaan, Lochgilphead, Argyll, Scotland.



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ScoTpress - Sheila Clark, Valerie Piacentini, Janet Quarton & Shona



MAXIMUM PREJUDICE

by

Maggy

CHAPTER ONE

The shuttlecraft moved slowly into position for entering the clamshell doors of its mothership, the Enterprise. As the giant Starship came closer the passengers on the shuttle rushed to the small hatch window to gain a first glimpse of the gleaming craft that was to be their home for the next three years. Only one passenger remained seated. He sat stiff-backed, hands clasped in his lap. He seemed almost completely unaware of the excited chatter and furore going on around him but as the red warning light came on beneath the docking sign, his deep voice broke through the noise.

"Ensigns. Please return to your designated seats at once."

Silence descended on the group as the First Officer continued, "It is against regulation 276c to stand during docking manoeuvres." The voice held no emotion, the thin face had an alien tranquillity.

"Sir, we just want to see the Enterprise before we dock."

"There will be ample time to acquaint yourself with the ship during your time aboard her, Mr Nim."

The Ensign was surprised that his new First Officer remembered his name after such a short time and given the number of replacement crew he had interviewed over the last few days. Nim, unsure how to respond, decided to say nothing. This Vulcan was an unknown quantity.

Since boarding the shuttle, none of the new men had spoken to the Vulcan officer. He wore the blue tunic and insignia of the Science section and the braid of a Commander. Science Officers were classed as a breed apart, probably because they tended to have a far more academic background than the rest of the crew. This Science Officer was stranger than most, having come from the planet Vulcan. Under the dark penetrating gaze of the officer, Nim returned meekly to his seat. The rest of the standing ensigns followed.

Two men sitting across the aisle from Mr Spock were deep in conversation, voices low.

"Stiff-necked bastard," Phillips whispered.

"Well, what do you expect from his sort?"

"What d'you mean? Rule book worshippers?"

"No, Vulcans. They're just a step away from Romulans, and they're hand in hand with the Klingons. I just don't trust any of 'em. This one, word is that his family are important, that's probably how he got his promotion in the first place nepotism."

Phillips just nodded. He had learned the hard way not to challenge anything Yates had to say.

Yates continued, "My brother is already aboard, in Engineering. He'll tell you all about Vulcans. He wanted to marry one once, but her family wouldn't hear of it. They're all the same. Cold as ice. He hates 'em more than me."

Phillips felt sorry for anyone who got on the wrong side of the Yates brothers. He had not met the elder brother, but knew of his reputation for a terrible temper almost verging on psychosis. By some miracle Yates had never lost his control to such an extent that it had put his career at risk; or, if he had, no-one had been brave enough to testify against him.

Spock, on ensuring everyone was once again seated, turned his attention to issuing last-minute instructions to the shuttle pilot. As First Officer, Spock was in command of this shuttle load of replacement crew, made up of a mixture of experienced men and raw Academy graduates, detailed to replace those lost during a skirmish with water smugglers in the Mengen sector. Few of the replacements had apparently seen a Vulcan in the flesh before and Spock had had to endure their curious stares all the way from Starbase Two. He looked forward to the peaceful solitude his quarters afforded. He was due to come off duty after ensuring the new crew members were allotted cabins and included in the duty roster. Then he would have approximately six hours.... ample time to renew his mental shields and rest.

It was good to be home....

Phillips continued, "Friends in high places, eh?"

"Friends? No! Vulcans don't have friends - they don't need anyone. They think they're so superior. We're just savages to them."

"Yeah?" Phillips glanced across at Spock, who was checking his mission report. As First Officer of the Enterprise, he had spent several days at Starbase Two ensuring that there had been no problems in securing replacement crew, and then dispatching the packs of personal effects of the dead back to their grieving families. Included inside each of the neatly sealed packets was a letter of condolence from the Captain of the Enterprise, James Kirk.

Spock thought it unnecessary to send pieces of paper when a sub-space printout would do as well. The Captain had spent several hours of his precious off-duty time composing them, so Spock had concluded they must be a part of the Human rite of grieving, something he had not experienced. The Humans seemed to expend as much emotion over a corpse as they did over the living. It was only a shell; why did they not show more concern over the person's welfare while they were alive? Surely more logical. He was aware the two ensigns seated across the aisle were discussing him but chose not to listen. He continued to flick through the pages of his precise and neatly-written report.

"Sure, they're fine ones to talk." Seeing he now had Phillips' undivided attention Yates continued, "You've heard about how they mate?"

"No. How?" There was ill-disguised eagerness in Phillips' voice.

Yates leered. "Well, I've heard they'll grab any woman, doesn't matter what age, what race, when they get the urge. No woman is safe when they're in rut. When they've done, if the woman isn't already dead they kill her and anyone else unlucky enough to get in their way. They go completely bonkers."

Phillips' mouth hung open as he digested this information, then said angrily, "If what you say is true, whatever are Starfleet doing, letting a thing like that serve on board a ship with women crewmembers?"

Yates shrugged, pleased at the response his words had evoked.

"Well, we can make damn sure that all the crew get to know what the First Officer is like. He won't get his dirty hands on any of our women. Let him go and find one of his own kind."

There was a soft whoosh as the Starship's bay doors closed behind the shuttle and locked tight, then a swish as the shuttle hatch dropped to reveal the brightly lit interior of the Enterprise.

The Vulcan rose to his feet with a cat-like grace and stood before the exit. He turned to face the new recruits and waited patiently until he had their undivided attention.

"Gentlemen. Welcome to the U.S.S. Enterprise. As you will soon discover for yourselves she is widely considered the pride of the fleet. Her Captain is eager that this reputation is maintained. I, as her First Officer, consider it is my duty to ensure it is so. Therefore, you will complete your duties diligently and will be expected to give your best at all times."

His black eyes scrutinised each one in turn.

"On behalf of Captain Kirk, welcome... Now if you will collect your belongings and follow me."

Slowly the young men gathered their kitbags and made their way to the exit. A small group of gold-shirted officers moved towards the shuttle. They stood to attention in front of Commander Spock and one ginger-haired engineering officer handed the Vulcan a rota disc. Spock deftly inserted it into a nearby computer terminal and his long nimble fingers flew over the keys.

"Thank you, Mr Rice. The new duty shifts are now recorded. Please ensure all ranks are issued with the new roster. Are the departments and cabins ready to receive the new intake?"

"Yes, sir. As per your instructions, Mr Spock."

Spock turned to the new men.

"Gentlemen, please follow these officers as your name is called. They will show you to your accommodation and then organise your work details with the respective department heads. Good luck."

As the group dispersed Spock saw a tall figure step out of the nearby turbo lift and hurry in his direction, the overhead lights reflecting from the circles of braid on his wrists.

"Spock." Captain James Kirk rushed to welcome his First Officer, a close friend. A half curl of blonde hair fell untidily over his hazel eyes.

"How did it go?"

Spock stood and looked at the one Human he felt close to.

"Everything is satisfactory, sir. We are now at full crew strength, and I have just completed the new duty roster."

"Good, good!" Kirk could hardly hide his pleasure at having the Vulcan back on board.

"Well, I'll try to see you after your rest break."

"Yes, sir."

They walked side by side to the lift, the well-built blond Human and the tall dark Vulcan.

CHAPTER TWO

Spock found after four hours of meditation and rest he was adequately refreshed, and apart from a need for nutriment was ready to resume his duties.

He made his way to the canteen. The place was crowded, the noise deafening as crewmen caught up on gossip and tried to outdo each other's outrageous tales of their last shore leave.

To the Vulcan the sound had almost the same effect as physical blows, as the reverberations battered against his extremely acute hearing. He raised his mental shields to a higher level and tried to retreat further into himself.

To the yeomen standing beside him the First Officer seemed as calm as ever, giving no outward sign of the discomfort he was feeling. As he waited in the queue for the food processor units, his hands clasped behind his back, his ever-vigilant dark eyes scanned the crowds. He gave the impression of a strict disciplinarian; with his Vulcan mystique he certainly seemed cold and unapproachable to many of the ship's complement. Only a few, who had worked closely with him, realised that there was an entirely different side to Spock; a side he kept carefully hidden, buried beneath the Vulcan mask of non-emotion.

Upon reaching the processor at last, Spock chose Bertakk soup and Ihntya with L'lorsa. As he waited for the meal to be delivered to the holding bin, his black eyes settled on a tall, beefy Ensign across the room. The man wore the insignia of the Engineering Section. Spock noted the struggling bundle being hidden, unsuccessfully, beneath an immense arm. The man was known to Spock as a bully and a troublemaker. Mr Scott, the Chief Engineer, had on several occasions had to put the Ensign on charges for fighting.

"Mr Yates." Spock's deep voice broke through the clamour.

Heads turned, and the noise level dropped, as everyone in the canteen waited to see what was going on. Yates hurriedly thrust the struggling bundle to another Ensign.

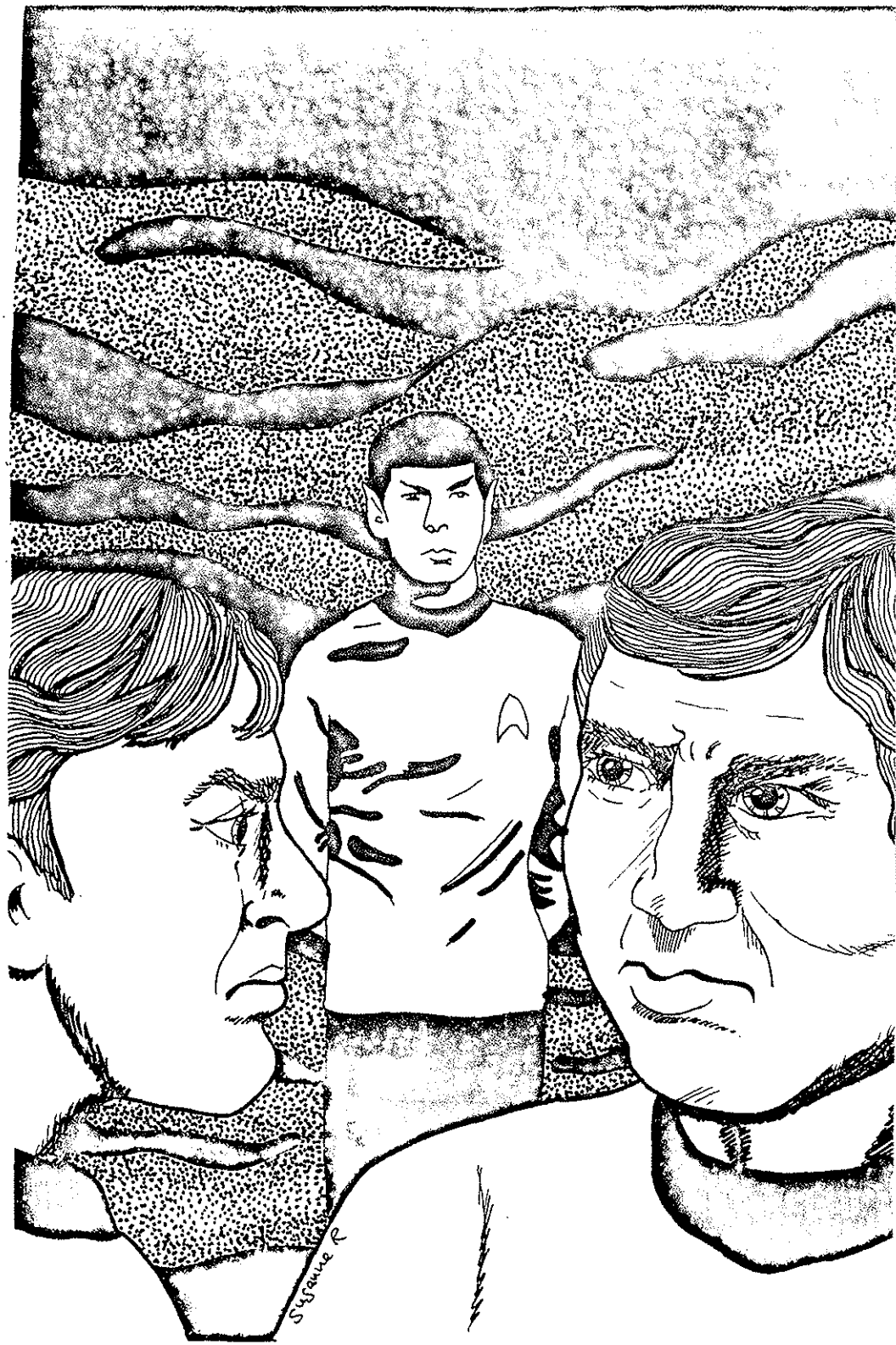
"Yes?"

"Yes, sir," Spock corrected. There was a slight emphasis on the word sir. "I wish a word with you - now!"

Yates glared and with a quick glance back at his friends sauntered slowly across to stand toe to toe with his Commander.

"Yes, sir!" He sounded supercilious.

Spock chose to ignore it.



"What do you have in the bundle, Ensign?"

"Bundle, sir?" Yates replied.

"Yes. The one you were attempting to conceal beneath your arm."

"I don't know what you're talking about!" Yates snapped.

"Sir." Spock quietly corrected. He was unruffled by the challenge to his authority.

Yates sneered, "Sir."

Spock had the air of a very patient adult dealing with a naughty child. "Mr Yates, I am the First Officer, and as such, will be addressed at all times with respect. Do you understand? Failure to comply will only lead to a charge being laid against you. You do understand?"

"Yes, sir."

"Very well. Now once more What do you have in the bundle?"

Yates chewed his lower lip. He glanced back at his friends for a sign of their support.

"I am waiting, Mr Yates."

"It's just a cat."

Spock's eyebrows rose to hide under his silky hair. "I beg your pardon. Did you say a cat?"

"Yes. I suppose you don't know what a cat is. Not being Human." Yates managed to make the last words sound like an insult.

Spock remained unmoved although a stir passed through the crowd.

"You are incorrect in your assumption, Mr Yates. I am well aware of the creature; Genus Felis, a native of Sol III. Family Felidae recognised by biological science in 1758 Old World Earthdate. Felidae consisted of 37 species including lion, tiger, cheetah and, of course, the long-extinct leopard. Most were driven to the edge of extinction by the Human race, who put great value on clothing themselves in the skins of dead animals. There are similar creatures on Tharius IV, also reports of fossil remains being found on Temir as recently as" He stopped and swallowed hard as he realised that the entire gathering was staring at him.

"But we digress, Mr Yates. Why did you bring livestock aboard? I am sure you are aware of rule 774 paragraph 7b. It specifically forbids the bringing on board of any livestock without due authorisation and full decontamination."

Yates sighed loudly and raised his eyes to the ceiling.

"You have nothing to say, Mr Yates?"

The Ensign muttered something under his breath, making the mistake of underestimating the power of Vulcan hearing.

Spock's face paled visibly. He straightened to his full height. His facial expression never

altered but his voice lowered a fraction.

"Mr Yates. You are hereby charged with insubordination and contravening Starfleet Regulation 772 paragraph 7b. Take the animal to decontamination immediately."

Yates' lips became a tight line. Hatred blazed in his eyes.

"I only brought the damn cat on board as a favour. I was going to get rid of it when we reached Rima 4."

"You can give your defence at the Enquiry, Ensign. Do not compound your offences. I gave you an order. Follow it ... now! If you please."

Returning to his friends Yates snatched the still struggling cat and pushed his way out of the canteen.

The Vulcan officer turned back to the food processor and collecting his meal moved to the table he usually shared with his Captain. He allowed himself a small inward sigh. His Human half was feeling anger and resentment at Yates' muttered insults. Immediately his Vulcan side pushed the emotions down deep into the depths, to be stored well away from the surface, to be left there with all the others until he was alone in his quarters. Then he could indulge himself by examining each one; dissecting them; trying to understand why his Human elements would not be vanquished but forever fought to be dominant.

With the confrontation over the onlookers began to disperse, leaving the Vulcan to eat his meal alone. Spock had just finished the bowl of Ihntya when his Captain arrived, out of breath.

"Mr Spock. I'm sorry. I had hoped to join you before you went back on duty."

Spock gazed up at his friend. He failed to mask a look of puzzlement. "Join me, Captain?"

"I had hoped to get here in time to be able to eat my meal at the same time as you had yours," Kirk tried to explain himself. When would Spock stop taking everything he said so literally? "I hope that you won't hold it against me?"

"Hold what against you, Captain?" Spock's eyes twinkled.

"Spock, you're an old fraud!" Kirk laughed. "You know very well what I mean."

Spock nodded. "Indeed I do, Captain. I'm sorry to have to leave you but I am due on the Bridge in precisely five minutes."

Kirk looked disappointed. As the Vulcan stood he moved his remaining untouched food towards his friend. "Perhaps you would like to try this? It is a new addition to the menu."

"What is it?" Jim Kirk tried to force a smile as he peered into the dish.

"L'tersa."

"Oh."

As soon as Spock had left, Kirk took the foul-smelling slop and tipped it down the

garbage chute. He couldn't get used to Vulcan food. Instead he programmed himself a large double helping of Yankee Pot Roast followed by ice cream and coffee. Out of deference for Spock's vegetarian beliefs Pot Roast was something he didn't order when Spock was with him, so now he was alone he was able to tuck in with relish.

Spock had just left the Science Lab after a quick check on one of his on-going experiments. He was walking in the direction of the turbo-lift when a slight sound reached his ears. The sound was one of anguish ... a Human baby? Almost like a computer his brilliant mind searched through his stored knowledge, evaluating and dismissing information until 'cat' emerged as the most logical source of the sound. Of course, the cat Yates had brought aboard. It was caged in the decontamination room. Yates had not bothered to attempt to claim it or take any interest in it since bringing aboard.

As Spock was mulling over the cat Nurse Chapel came rushing around the corner and crashed headlong into him, falling to the floor. Her face turned a deep red as she realised with whom she had collided. She struggled to get up, trying to pull the short uniform skirt to a modest length, but failed. Spock offered his hand and pulled her to her feet.

"I'm so sorry, Mr Spock. I was on my way to a medical emergency in decom."

"What is the nature of the emergency, Nurse?"

She gazed in a trance-like state at Spock. He felt her adoration batter at his shields.

She stammered, "Ensign Cook has been badly bitten."

"By what?" Spock didn't really need to ask.

"I believe it was a cat, sir."

"I will accompany you, Nurse."

"Very well, sir." Christine could hardly believe her luck! A chance to be in such close contact with Commander Spock. She had adored him from the first moment she had seen him. Then all romantic thoughts were driven from her mind as she found she had to almost run to keep up with the long strides of the Vulcan.

"I believe that Cook was listed as general repair crew this watch," Spock said almost to himself as Nurse Chapel was some distance behind him. She made a real effort and on reaching his side somewhat out of breath, answered.

"I think he was working in the decontamination room at the time of the accident."

The First Officer managed to avoid direct eye contact as he said coldly, "Nurse Chapel, follow me." He pushed past a crowd of chattering crewmen who'd gathered at the entrance to the room.

"Continue with your assigned duties immediately, gentlemen." No-one moved. Spock stopped. His dark eyes flashed.

"I have just given an order. Please do not expect me to repeat it!" The group, led by Yates, reluctantly dispersed. Spock carried on into the room, Christine at his heels.

One of the crewmen outside sneered, "Just look at that makes you sick. The way our

women chase after that machine."

"Jealous, are you?" Roberts laughed.

"No. Anyway, I wouldn't want to be in his shoes. Not with Yates after his blood, if you can call that green goo blood."

"Aw, come on." Roberts said. "Commander Spock's not that bad. Most times he's fair - he's just different, that's all."

Collins turned to face Roberts, his eyes narrow slits. "Joined his fan club too? I'd be careful if I was you."

"What are you getting at?" Roberts sounded frightened.

"Well, you might get caught up in something very unpleasant."

Roberts wasn't a fool. He recognised a warning when he heard one. "Right."

Meanwhile Nurse Chapel was bathing the scratches that covered the face, neck and hands of the very shaken Ensign Cook. Spock, quietly and surprisingly gently, questioned Cook as to the cause of his injuries.

"Ensign, what happened?"

"Sir, I had just come in to repair the cage door. Mr Phillips had reported it faulty during his duty shift. The door was completely off. The cat was free and when I approached it, it went for me."

Spock immediately organised a ship-wide search for the missing cat. Once that was underway he examined the empty cage. His long, nimble fingers turned the lock over and over. A thoughtful frown flitted across his face, to vanish in an instant.

"The animal procured its freedom with the aid of a laser torch, Mr Cook."

Cook took the proffered lock and inspected the smooth clean cut in the mechanism.

Spock waited until Chapel had finished her first-aid treatment. Then, taking the lock back, he said, "Very well, Mr Cook. You are relieved for the rest of this duty period." Turning to the Security Officer standing guard at the door, he added, "Please see a relief is assigned, Mr Fox."

"Yes, sir. At once."

Christine packed away her medical kit. "Mr Cook." She helped him to stand. "Report to Sickbay tomorrow to have those wounds checked, just to be on the safe side. Doctor McCoy will want to give you a broad spectrum shot."

"All right, Nurse." Cook looked to be in pain.

Spock moved closer. "Will you need assistance to return to your quarters, Mr Cook?" His voice had lost its austere tone and was soft. "I shall escort you there, if you will allow me?"

"Thank you, sir. I'll manage."

"Very well." Deciding that there was no longer anything to keep him from his duties on the Bridge, Spock turned to leave. As he did so, the Captain entered the room.

"Mr Spock, is everything under control? What's all this about a dangerous animal on board?"

"I shall endeavour to acquaint you with all the facts as I know them, sir."

With that the two officers left, walking shoulder to shoulder, deep in conversation. The Captain and Mr Spock had just reached the bridge when Uhura called,

"Mr Spock, there's a message from C Deck. They've cornered the cat in a locker room and are awaiting instructions."

"Very well, Lieutenant. Inform them I shall be there directly."

Captain Kirk turned to his First Officer. "You have my permission to use whatever means are necessary to ensure the safety of my ship and crew. Be careful, Spock. One injured crewman is enough."

An eyebrow rose slightly. "I am sure that this creature can be contained without resorting to excessive measures, sir."

"I hope so. I know you think I'm over-reacting, Spock but this cat has already badly injured one man. Judging by Cook's face it isn't the fluffy little pussy-cat I remember as a child. Also, McCoy is busy with the new stock lists. He won't want to be snowed under with work - even minor bites and scratches. So, just go carefully. Okay?"

"I will endeavour to resolve the problem without having to call upon the Doctor's beads and rattles."

Kirk grinned. Obviously, the feud between Spock and McCoy was still alive and well.

The cat was cowering behind a stack of uniforms. Its fur was raised, its teeth bared in a ferocious snarl. Loud growls rumbled from deep in its throat. The young Yeoman who had found its hiding place stood guard in the doorway but, content to leave the capture to someone else, backed away into the corridor on the arrival of the Vulcan. Spock quietly turned and closed the door, leaving himself alone with the cat.

He then crouched down and began to talk slowly and quietly in his native tongue. A pair of amber eyes, wide with apprehension, unblinkingly watched the Vulcan. The cat waited for the expected attack which didn't come. Instead Spock sat cross-legged on the floor and continued to talk. The cat's fur slowly lowered. The eyes, still wide, darted from one side of the room to the other, looking for an escape route. Perhaps this was a clever trap, but the man seemed content to sit and wait. The deep voice with its almost hypnotic quality held the cat's attention. Spock sat for 20.6 minutes talking quietly.

Captain Kirk, concerned by Spock's long absence, arrived and with an ear to the door tried to ascertain what was happening. Just as he was losing his patience and was about to over-ride the locking mechanism the door slid smoothly open. Spock was revealed cradling a small grey and white long-haired cat. It was purring contentedly, but on seeing Kirk its hackles rose and a deep growl rumbled in its throat.

"Careful, Spock," Kirk warned, stepping backwards.

"It is quite all right, Captain. It will not harm you."

"Don't be insulted if I don't entirely take your word for that, Spock."

The Vulcan was somewhat taken aback by that. "I can assure you, the animal is really very friendly." Spock proceeded to pat the cat's head in an absent way. Its tongue leapt out and ran along the Vulcan's pale green skin.

"See," Spock said.

Kirk wasn't convinced by this apparent show of affection. "Get it out of here, Spock! That's an order."

"Yes, sir." He turned as he reached the door. "The animal was severely distraught at being confined in a cage. May I have permission to take the creature to my quarters until we reach the next Starbase?"

Kirk was astonished. "Spock, do you realise what this means?"

"I beg your pardon?"

"Spock, keeping a pet is a Human trait. It means your Human half is peeking through."

Spock managed to keep his face blank.

"I do not wish to be insulted. I only endeavour to relieve an animal's distress. I did not think my action would be misinterpreted." He sounded edgy.

Kirk relented. "I'm sorry, Spock. I was only teasing."

Spock's face remained blanker than usual. There was a moment's pause, then. "Tease? Ah yes! Tease, bait, annoy, ridicule ..."

"Spock! It was just supposed to be a joke." Kirk looked into the dark eyes and they twinkled in a way he had grown to know so well.

"Okay... I give in you win! Take the cat but I won't have it roaming the ship. If it causes any more trouble I'll wring its neck."

Spock said nothing but as he walked away he held the small animal protectively close.

CHAPTER THREE

Doctor McCoy distractedly pushed the remains of his meal around his plate as the Captain outlined the ways his latest orders from Starfleet Command would affect McCoy's department.

"So you see, Bones, you'll need extra supplies of almost everything. Storage won't be a major problem. We can move a couple of crew to another deck and utilise their quarters for extra room." McCoy nodded.

"Just let me know in the next couple of hours exactly what you'll need." Kirk sipped his

coffee. "One minute we're bored stiff; the next there's no time to think."

McCoy peered into the Captain's face. "You aren't doing too much again, are you? After the Menger battle you should have taken shore-leave."

Kirk frowned. "It wasn't a battle."

"Oh no? Well, maybe not to you, but it certainly looked like it in Sickbay."

"Bones, I'm sorry. I didn't mean to make it sound like nothing. How could it be, when we lost so many men. I'll never get used to that side of service life."

"Nobody does, Jim." As he spoke McCoy caught a glimpse of black, silky hair bobbing above the crowd just entering the rec room.

"Hi, Spock! Over here!" he bellowed.

The Vulcan visibly winced. Why did Humans have to be so loud? He bowed his head as an indication that he had heard, thinking to himself he would have had little difficulty doing that even if he had been several decks away! He made his way to the food dispenser, selected a dish of K'Lapauh, and waited patiently until the amber light turned green and the steaming hot snack was delivered into the holding bin. Spock pulled the tray from the hatch and made his way carefully between the holo-games to reach Kirk and McCoy's table.

"Captain, Doctor," he acknowledged quietly. Once seated he turned his attention to McCoy.

"Doctor, you are aware there are several biological differences between Humans and myself?"

McCoy frowned. What was going on in that alien mind now? "Yes, Spock. You know I do. Why?"

"If that is so, Doctor, please refrain from raising your voice when addressing me. My hearing abilities are extremely well-developed. In short, Doctor..... I AM NOT DEAF!"

A long silence followed before McCoy snapped, "Sorry. I didn't realise you were so touchy."

"Your apology is accepted, Doctor."

Kirk grinned. "When are you two going to get along without bickering all the time?"

"I don't know what you're talking about, Jim." McCoy sounded genuinely mystified. Spock just raised his eyebrows questioningly.

McCoy, having finished his meal, gazed across at Spock's plate. "God, Spock. Whatever is that mess?"

"K'Lapauh." Spock answered between mouthfuls of grey chunks.

"Are they spines?" Kirk, who by this time was also looking hard at Spock's plate, asked.

"Yes, Captain. They are never removed as they add to the flavour."

"That stuff has flavour?" McCoy gasped. Kirk gave him an icy stare, determined to stop the bickering before it went too far.

"Spock, you seem to be eating a lot of dishes I haven't seen before," he said.

"Indeed. I found Starfleet's concoctions unpalatable, so I reprogrammed the dispenser."

"Isn't there a regulation somewhere forbidding that?" McCoy was still trying to provoke Spock into a fight.

"Bones, isn't it time you were back in Sickbay?" Kirk hinted.

Reluctantly McCoy took his empty dishes to the disposal chute, leaving his two friends to finish their meal and discuss the up-coming mission. He comforted himself with the fact that most of the conversation would be over his head anyway.

There were a considerable number of scientific experiments to be completed involving Spock's department. Kirk was concerned that Starfleet perhaps expected too much, but Spock took it all in his stride, assuring his Captain there was nothing that couldn't be completed during the voyage with a little extra effort. Spock's meticulous correlation of data during their last mission left Kirk with little doubt Spock would ensure Starfleet's analysis departments would have plenty to keep them busy on the Enterprise's return.

The discussion was intense and extremely technical. It took all of Kirk's concentration to keep up with Spock's brilliant mind. As he outlined the various procedures that he intended using over the coming months Kirk got the distinct impression that Spock was even then simplifying the procedures for his benefit.

After about ten minutes Kirk noticed a shadow seem to pass across the First Officer's face. As they had become such close friends he had come to recognise even the slightest sign of emotion in the alien mask Spock so carefully maintained. His friend was experiencing pain; emotional or physical he wasn't sure.

Suddenly Spock's fork dropped with a clatter onto his plate. His long fingers gripped the edge of the table, knuckles glowing white beneath the pale green skin.

"Spock?" Kirk whispered.

The Vulcan didn't answer, just looked up with unseeing eyes.

Spock swayed in his chair as Kirk reached across the narrow table in a vain attempt to snatch his friend's arm and prevent him from falling, but he was too late. Spock collapsed in a limp heap on the floor. Kirk pushed his chair backwards. It tipped and crashed over as he rushed to his First Officer's aid.

"Call a medic - quick!" he shouted as he saw green blood begin to form a thick sticky pool under Spock's head. Kirk knew better than to try to move the unconscious Vulcan; besides, his body weight was considerably heavier than that of a Human of similar build due to increased bone density. However Kirk could at least loosen the collar of the blue tunic, now wet with blood, and check that Spock's airway was clear. He couldn't do much more until a medic arrived so he knelt down beside his friend, holding the thin pale hand, trying to convey comfort. The pulse in the long fingers beat regularly, if slightly fainter than usual.

McCoy pushed his way through the crowd of onlookers.

"Get back. Return to your posts. There's nothing to see!" he shouted angrily, knowing the Captain would have cleared the room had his concern for Spock not precluded all other thoughts.

"What happened, Jim?" McCoy asked as Kirk moved position to allow him room to examine Spock.

"I don't know." Worry was clear in his voice. "He looked in some kind of pain for a moment, then keeled over. I tried to grab him but missed, and he must have hit his head going down."

McCoy gently lifted Spock's eyelid then carefully turned his head to one side to reveal a jagged gash and matted, blood-stained hair. McCoy sucked in an involuntary gulp of air, the only indication of his anxiety. Taking a scalpel and swab he carefully cut away the sodden hair and cleaned the wound. Kirk sat and held the Vulcan's hand, trying to pass his strength to the still form. So many times Spock had helped to ease his pain. Why couldn't he return the comfort? He was brought out of his reverie by McCoy.

"It looks far worse than it is, Jim." He ran the scanner over Spock's head and body. "Very nasty cut but no damage to the brain. There is something strange here though I'll get him to Sickbay. I want to find the reason for his collapse and to close the wound with the protoplaser."

He waved his orderlies forward with the anti-grav stretcher. Kirk helped lift his friend onto it, careful not to cause more damage to the bloody wound which despite McCoy's ministrations was still slowly, but steadily, seeping the jade green blood.

A week later Spock was sitting up in bed in the Sickbay recovery room. He demanded to be allowed to speak to the Captain. Worried that the fuss would disturb other patients McCoy asked Kirk to visit as soon as his workload would allow. Only when Kirk arrived did Spock show signs of calming down.

"Jim, please tell the Doctor I am fully recovered and wish to return to my duties."

Jim Kirk knew of the amazing healing powers of Vulcans and nodded as he gently pushed his friend back to a recumbent position.

"Okay. Steady on, Spock. I'll go and have a word with McCoy."

"Thank you, Captain." The words were spoken with surprising intensity. Vulcans rarely expressed thanks so openly. It was obvious Spock was desperate to leave the confines of Sickbay. As a telepath it couldn't be easy for him in an area where other peoples' pain was broadcast so openly.

Kirk found McCoy in his small office. The Doctor looked up from the pile of report chips and relief crossed his face.

"Oh great, Jim. Glad you could come so quickly. That green-blooded machine out there is driving me mad!"

Kirk perched on the edge of McCoy's desk. "Well if he's able to rant like that, Bones, why isn't he well enough to return to duty?"

"Because of this." McCoy flicked a switch on his computer console. A row of figures and graphs appeared on the screen.

Kirk frowned. "Bones, you don't know how to run a Starship and I don't know how to remove an appendix - so explain what the gibberish means."

"It's the results of the tests I ran on Spock when he was admitted." He jabbed at the screen with a stylus. "This.. this here worries me. This blue patch here."

"What is it?"

McCoy's face became immensely serious. "Blue is... well ... well, it indicates the presence of a poison."

"Poison?" Kirk echoed. "What kind of poison? Where would he have been exposed to it?"

McCoy looked uncomfortable. "Jim, my analysis results from the lab show it's a kind of engineering lubricant. I've double-checked it, but what's really worrying is ... it was almost certainly taken orally."

There was a silence as Kirk absorbed what McCoy had said. "You're saying Spock swallowed it." He failed to hide the incredulous tone in his voice.

"Yes."

"You mean to try and tell me Spock swallowed lubricant?"

"Yes," McCoy said seriously. "I'm positive, Jim."

"Why? Why would he do that?"

"A suicide attempt?" McCoy suggested.

"Don't be daft, Bones! Not only is suicide against Vulcan ideology, he isn't the type to kill himself, and even if he was, he's such a damn perfectionist, he'd have found a more fool-proof way than swallowing lubricant. No - I can't believe he'd do this on purpose."

"I tend to agree. It does seem unlikely. So, the question is ... how did he come to ingest it? That stuff wouldn't be used much except on the engineering decks, would it?"

Kirk got up and paced the small office. Finally he went to the desk intercom and contacted the Chief Engineer, Mr Scott.

"Scotty, tell me - is there a chance lubrication fluid could seep into the food processors and contaminate the food?"

"No way, Captain."

"Mr Spock reprogrammed the Vulcan menu. Could have anything have gone wrong because of that?"

"Oh, sir, if our Mr Spock did it, we can be sure nothin' would be astray. I check the units every couple o' days. The last check was yesterday. They canna be tampered with once they're

loaded ... Hold on a sec, will ye?"

There was a brief pause, "Can I call you back, sir? There's a wee problem down here."

"Yes. Carry on. It's okay, Scotty."

The link was broken. Kirk turned to McCoy. "I suppose there was a chance one of the meals was faulty or even tampered with before it was packed into the processor... but why?"

McCoy thought hard and said, "There's been talk... and that's all it's been... that Spock has had some kind of run-in with that Ensign Yates."

"What about?"

"I don't know, but you know as well as me that Yates is a vindictive devil. I've patched up a few of his victims before now."

"Yes. I've heard his last posting was cut short by special request of his Captain. God knows how I came to get him."

"Probably because Starfleet thought you would trim his tail feathers for him."

Kirk grinned. "More likely 'cause we're going to be at the far side of space for the next three years. A nice, long time for keeping our Mr Yates out of Command's hair."

"You know I suspect he is on the verge of a breakdown, Jim?"

"Spock as First Officer is directly responsible for all minor incidents of crew discipline. He deals with them very well and he hasn't referred Yates to me."

"I guess he was dealing with it in his logical way."

Kirk tapped into the main computer banks and waited for the file he wanted to be displayed on the screen. He ran a finger down, tracing the incidents, and stopped at the last entry.

"Here it is. Spock was due to meet Yates in Briefing Room 3. The charges were insubordination and bringing an animal aboard without permission. The maximum penalty would probably have been the loss of his next shore-leave and the docking of a month's pay. I can't imagine anyone being so upset about that that it'd trigger a murder attempt..... No, Bones. I think the answer must be some sort of freak accident."

McCoy nodded. "I suppose so, but I can't think how."

"Well, Bones, have you asked Spock about it?"

"Of course I have. He doesn't remember anything between sitting down in the rec room and waking up in here. He denied taking it on purpose."

"Is he fit?" Concern was written plainly on the handsome face.

"Yes, after I cleaned him up and filtered his blood. Got the constitution of an ox he's just a bit tired, but considering the hours he works, that's no surprise."

"Then release him for duty. I'm sure there's just been a slip up somewhere, Bones. Don't forget we're carrying several replacement crew, most of whom are rookies. Any one of the new Engineering transfers could have made a simple error."

McCoy nodded grudgingly, but muttered, "A simple error, but it could have killed Spock."

CHAPTER FOUR

As the days passed and the giant Starship made her way towards the Eridani system on the first stage of her next scientific study, the incident was forgotten.

Captain Kirk had reported Spock's illness as a possible accident in his official report but in his personal log he stated his doubts and his suspicion of Yates' involvement.

McCoy reported Spock had made a complete recovery with no after effects. One effect the incident did have was that from that moment McCoy tended to watch Yates much more closely.

The rec room was quiet when Kirk arrived to join Uhura and Scott for a friendly drink before he took over from Spock on the Bridge. Uhura wore a dress of red silk, cut in the style of the Nesloshions. It certainly clung to all the right places, Kirk noticed appreciatively, but then he had always thought her beautiful even when she was on duty in uniform. Scott beamed a wide welcoming smile.

"Captain. Pleased you could make it. I hope you dinna mind a wee bit o' official business afore we have a dram?"

"What is it, Scotty?" Kirk asked as he pulled up a chair and sat down.

"Well I dinna like t' bother ye with it but I'm a wee bittie worried aboot a laddie in ma department." As usual when Scott got upset his accent thickened, so Kirk had to concentrate to catch what was being said.

"Who?"

"Yates."

"What now? Isn't he something Mr Spock is dealing with, Scotty?" It was a cop out, and Kirk knew it, as did Scott. Since the last mission Kirk had begun to feel increasingly guilty at the extra workload piled onto the Vulcan; still, it was a terrible temptation to unload all the awkward day-to-day problems onto him, especially anything to do with the crew. Spock's judgement was unclouded by Human feelings and frailties, and his unemotional approach often calmed things down without too much fuss.

Scott wasn't to be put off so easily. "I'm sorry, sir, but it concerns Mr Spock too."

"Oh?"

"Yes, sir. Ship's scuttlebutt has it that Yates, his brother and a chappie called Phillips are out to 'get' Mr Spock."

"Get?" Anger rose in his voice. "Why? What's Spock done to trigger all this?"

"Well, apart from the charges ... Yates was planning to sell the cat to a dealer on Rima 4. It would have fetched a lot of credits. They have a rat problem."

"Yes. Spock was too ill to attend the hearing so the charges were laid to one side. I had Yates in for a reprimand instead. He mentioned something about the rats and how he would make a profit on the cat By the way, what's happened to it?"

Uhura smiled. "Nurse Chapel looked after it while Mr Spock was in Sickbay."

Kirk also smiled. Chapel's feelings about the Vulcan First Officer were common knowledge amongst the Bridge crew. "The cat is back in the Commander's quarters now, sir," Uhura added.

Scotty brought the conversation back to the point. "Beggin' yer pardon, sir, but Yates is a bad lot; not the type ye'd want to cross... if ye get ma meaning."

Kirk became angry. "There's no place aboard the Enterprise for anyone who can't take orders, Mr Scott. Why hasn't this matter been brought to my attention before this?"

"Mr Spock is confident he can handle it, sir, but he doesn't appreciate how evil we Humans can be. Sir, I really think things are gettin' a wee bit out of hand now. What with all the talk, sir."

"What's being said?"

"Oh, it's all rubbish... about Mr. Spock and his habits," Scotty was turning slightly red.

"Habits? Oh, I see."

"No, sir, you don't. I dinna believe it and naebody else that knows Mr Spock does, but some of the new men... Well... And what really worries me is all the talk of revenge, sir."

"Revenge? What for? Not the cat business - because of Spock's accident the charges weren't even followed through."

"Exactly, sir," Scott said meaningfully. "A wee coincidence that Mr Spock was ill just then, would ye no say?"

Kirk nodded. "But no proof, Mr Scott."

"I've tried tae find some but no luck, sir. Yates is a queer fish. Seems every wee thing that goes wrong in his life, he needs someone to blame. Did you know he hates Vulcans? He was keen on a lassie once but the match was prevented by her family. I guess that's why he has such a dislike for our Mr Spock. He doesn't know him like we do."

Kirk sighed. Spock had never talked about his early years on the Enterprise serving under Chris Pike, but Kirk suspected things hadn't been easy for a Vulcan on a ship manned by Humans. In his early years aboard he himself had formed a wrong impression of Spock. Spock had appeared proud, aloof; a hard man to get to know. Once he had, though, Kirk discovered Spock was a shy genius, a caring man who for years had accepted, without resentment, the hurt caused by the crew's careless, ignorant comments. Slowly, mainly by Kirk's example, the crew began to understand the cold exterior Vulcan was not the complete

man and respect took the place of ignorance.

"Right, Mr Scott. Thanks for letting me know. It's my fault. I've been content to sit back, let things drift; let Spock do too much. Sometimes we tend to take it for granted that Spock understands all about us. That he is as cynical and untrusting as the rest of us.... At the start of third watch I want Spock, Yates and Phillips, plus anyone else who will testify to hearing threats made against Spock, to report to Briefing Room 2. Now, let's forget this shameful business. Where's that scotch you promised me?"

Kirk was not surprised to find Spock already seated in the briefing room when he arrived. The tall Vulcan stood as the Captain entered but Kirk motioned for him to sit back down.

"Oh, Spock. I'm glad you're here early. I wanted a quick word with you about Yates before this meeting becomes official. Now, off the record - what's going on?"

"I'm sorry, Captain. Can you elucidate?"

"Certainly, Mr Spock. I have received reports of threats made against you by Ensign Alan Yates. If you know why these threats have been made, I would like to know."

Spock's eyes narrowed. His facial expression remained blank.

"I'm sorry, sir. I had not realised that everyday cases of crew discipline were subject to the Captain's scrutiny." The soft tone of his voice did nothing to mask the indignation behind the words.

"I'm sorry, Mr Spock, if you feel that in some way I'm trespassing on your prerogative here, but how can I ignore the matter once it has been brought to my attention?"

Dark eyes held his. Kirk didn't need an answer. He could guess that Spock felt Kirk was interfering with the Vulcan's duties as First Officer. Kirk began to feel slightly uncomfortable at the tension between them. He hated anything that just might drive Spock back into his shell of Vulcan insulation.

"Captain, matters of crew discipline are initially the concern of the First Officer. I was handling the case of Ensign Yates in the manner prescribed by Starfleet Regulations. I am grieved that you have found reason to doubt my competence in doing so." Spock made it sound like a personal slur on his abilities.

Kirk swallowed hard, thoughts racing, as he tried to think of some way of defusing the situation. He had joined Starfleet to travel space discovering new worlds, new peoples, not to trade battles of words with Spock. He needed to say something quickly if he didn't want Spock walking around for weeks playing the tacit martyr.

"Look, Spock"

But the arrival of the Yates brothers stopped him from proceeding. He indicated that they should sit in the chairs facing the officers. Phillips, escorted by his section leader, arrived moments later. They all sat in silence whilst the Captain gave other crew-members time to come and give evidence. No-one arrived. The silence was uncomfortable; only Spock seemed relaxed. When it became unbearable to sit quietly any longer Kirk jabbed the intercom in front of him.

"Engineering."

"Scott here, sir."

"Mr Scott, are there any crew-members due to report to me concerning the matter we spoke of earlier?"

A slight pause. "I'm afraid not, sir. Nary a one."

"Is that so. Well, I'll have a word with you later. Thanks, Mr Scott." Kirk turned to Spock who sat stiff-backed, hands clasped loosely in his lap.

"Mr. Spock. Is there anything you wish to say concerning this matter?"

"I believe this meeting to be unnecessary. The matter is well in hand; there is nothing that I am not capable of dealing with at this time." A definite hardness had crept into his voice.

If the occasion had been different, Kirk would have rejoiced at the crack in the Vulcan mask that revealed the Human anger his friend was feeling.

.... FRIEND!....

That relationship was on dangerous ground. He would have to be very careful not to offend that Vulcan pride. Pride, an emotion. Spock would prefer to call it dignity.

"Mr Yates." Kirk turned to the older brother. He noted how Alan Yates sat gazing at Spock, eyes narrowed to evil slits. "I've had several reports concerning your behaviour since you joined this ship; incidents which I find disturbing to say the least. Mr Spock assures me he is dealing with it and I am content to leave the matter in his capable hands, but..." His voice dropped to a lower tone of warning. "Be assured, Mr Yates, I will not tolerate constant breaches of discipline aboard my ship. If any of you appear before me again it will result in no less than immediate transfer off this vessel. Do you understand?"

Yates nodded. The younger brother, new to the fleet, rose to his feet before Phillips could stop him.

Kirk said, "Be seated, Mr Yates."

"Permission to speak, sir."

"Very well. You have something to say that has a bearing on this inquiry?"

"Yes, I do! It's obvious you are taking sides in this because he is your friend." He pointed across at Spock. "It's not fair. Why take the word of that alien? What makes him better than us? GOD! He's just like a machine ... always perfect!"

"That will be enough!" Kirk's face was red with anger.

"Oh, so I can't even stick up for myself or my brother. You're just using any excuse to drum us out of the service. You don't know anything... How can you believe that walking encyclopaedia with ice water in his veins? He can even drink lubricant and keep going."

Kirk looked across to Spock, whose face remained expressionless. He turned back to Yates. "Mr Yates..."

Spock reached across the desk. His long fingers touched Kirk's sleeve in a gesture of restraint, then he stood and very quietly said, "Gentlemen, I believe this meeting is at an end. You will return to your quarters where you will remain to await the Captain's judgement. You are dismissed."

Later in the Captain's cabin Kirk and Spock sat over a chess game they both had a half-hearted interest in.

"I'm sorry, Spock. I nearly lost my temper back there. Thanks for stopping me saying something I might have regretted later. The ignorance of that man is amazing. He doesn't belong on this ship. I've decided to get a transfer order off to 'Fleet.'"

"Captain..."

But Kirk stopped his First Officer before he could continue. "NO! Spock, there's no place for a bigot on my ship and you heard him as good as admit to contaminating the food. I've made up my mind; the quicker he is off this ship the better. Mind you, I was surprised his brother didn't say more... After all, it was him that the original charges were brought against."

"Indeed. I fear losing his brother will only increase his anger."

"Then, Mr Spock, we had better keep an eye on him and if he steps out of line he too will join his brother on the next shuttle."

"Perhaps, given time, they may have...."

"Do you know something, Spock? Sometimes you can be too trusting of us Humans. We're a horrible lot. Better to be a bit wary. It's often safer."

His only answer was a raised eyebrow and a quiet, "Checkmate."

Kirk looked down to see he had lost yet again to the Vulcan. He sighed. "Two out of three?"

CHAPTER FIVE

Spock was deep in thought as he made his way back to his cabin. He had been well aware of the threats to his life and had guessed Scott had been the one responsible for bringing them to his Captain's attention. Humans were such a very diverse species; good and bad, so much more interesting than the Vulcan race. He pushed the door release to his cabin and entered.

At once he sensed something was different. His eyes swept quickly across the dark, unlit cabin and rested on the upturned tri-dimensional chess set; the smashed firebowl; the torn letters. He stooped and carefully picked up the small shredded pieces of paper.

The deep pain he felt in his chest he recognised from his childhood as the Human desire to cry in despair. He held the pieces, trying to fit them back into their original order, back into the letters from his mother. The shreds fell from his fingers to the floor. He wondered how anyone could gain pleasure from such mindless destruction.

He was aroused from self-pity by the faint sound of breathing coming from above his

head. His dark eyes searched and found the wide amber eyes of the cat who sat, trembling, wedged into the top of the disc storage unit. Spock gently reached up and she dropped down into his arms. Spock had experienced prejudice while studying at Starfleet Academy, but it had always been in a general way, not as personal as this destruction of his property. Captain Pike had never hidden his view that Spock was a machine, to be used just like any other computer aboard. Spock had never been included in the social life of the officers until Jim Kirk had taken over command. Spock's life had then changed radically. Jim Kirk had made it almost impossible for Spock to stay the recluse he had been becoming.

Carefully Spock settled the cat into the bed he'd constructed from an empty drawer and an old uniform tunic. The cat purred as she clenched and unclenched her claws in a show of contentment. Spock allowed a brief smile to flicker across his face. As a Vulcan he had always been allocated a single cabin even during his Academy days, but now he had to admit to a warm affection for the small bundle of fur that had so suddenly entered his well-ordered life and now shared his quarters. There was something to the Human need for companionship. Perhaps Jim had been right ... perhaps his Human half was indeed peeking through. He must find more time to meditate on the matter and put things right.

There was a gentle tap on the door.

"Enter."

Uhura and Nurse Chapel stood hesitantly at the entrance.

"Yes?"

"Mr Spock," Uhura began, nudged on by a fiercely blushing Chapel. "We know you still have the cat in your quarters and we thought it might like these." Chapel held out a round tufted ball of wool and a small collar made from brightly coloured stretch ribbon. Spock took the ball carefully and turned it over, examining it as he would a specimen from a strange new planet.

"What is it?" he asked curiously.

Nurse Chapel smiled. "It's a pom-pom."

"Pom-pom? What is its purpose?"

"Why, Mr Spock, it's a toy for the cat."

"A toy?"

"Yes." Uhura looked disappointed. "We made it from scraps of wool."

"I see. A toy, a plaything, something to amuse Human children."

"Yes, and small animals, Mr Spock."

He frowned, a line creasing his brow. "It is not necessary to explain, Nurse, Miss Uhura. I have read about such things."

Christine sounded shocked. "Surely you had toys when you were young, Mr Spock?"

"No. On Vulcan toys are not necessary."

Christine, always eager to find out all she could about Spock, blurted, "But your mother was Human. Surely she gave you toys to play with as a young child?"

Spock began to look extremely uncomfortable, as the two women waited to hear his answer. "I believe I did once own a teddy bear." There, he had confessed. Vulcans could not lie. That was sometimes a hard tenet to live by.

"Oh. How sweet."

Before Christine could continue Spock added, "It was removed as unnecessary to my development."

"Who removed it?" Uhura asked, her curiosity also aroused.

Spock answered in barely a whisper, "T'Pau, my paternal grandmother."

Uhura thought, *Well that explains a lot*, but only said out loud, "Anyway Mr Spock, I'm sure the cat will enjoy the toy. By the way we can't keep calling it cat. What's its name?"

Chapel slipped the collar onto the cat, much to its dislike. Spock knew Uhura would not be put off by his answer.

"I have not given the creature a name. Therefore, you may decide what the animal will be called."

Uhura turned to Christine. "You choose, Chris. After all you looked after it while Mr. Spock was ill."

Spock's eyebrow rose. "I see I must offer my gratitude for your assistance to my friend," he said.

Christine smiled and Spock felt a wave of desire from her. "What's the Vulcan word for cat?" she asked. Her eyes never left his face.

"There isn't a direct translation. The nearest would be K'Max'Inop'Theonath."

The girls exchanged looks of horror then giggled. Spock decided he would never understand Human illogical thinking. Uhura was the first to recover and asked Spock to repeat the Vulcan name again... slowly; and again... slower still.

"Max," Christine said at last, triumphantly. "Its name is Max."

Spock's face remained blank. He said, "I believe that will serve until we offload the creature at the next Starbase."

Satisfied, the two girls said their farewells to the cat. Spock stood carefully in front of the chess set scattered on the floor and they left unaware there had been anything amiss. When they had gone he returned to the sleeping section and proceeded to clear up the mess left by the intruder. When all was tidy again he sat on his bunk and watched the cat pat the small cluster of wool playfully from one side of the bed to the other.

"Max," Spock whispered softly to himself.

Captain Kirk was true to his word and the younger Yates brother was transferred onto a passing deep space ore freighter to be offloaded at the next Starbase it came to. Word soon passed around the decks of the Enterprise that he had paid the price of insulting the First Officer in front of the Captain. The result was that everyone then tended to be guarded when in the Vulcan's company. So, instead of even the day to day conversation Spock found silence, and his isolation from the crew increased. Kirk's action, instead of protecting his friend as intended, had secluded him.

No-one aboard really liked the Yates brothers. Many expressed relief that one had gone, and wished the other had suffered the same fate. However, worried that a misunderstanding could lead to their transfer too, many crew stayed as distant as their work allowed. If their cautious behaviour bothered Spock he gave no sign. He was used to his own company and spent his off-duty hours in his quarters or working in the science labs. The only other place he could be found was playing chess with Jim Kirk when their duty shifts allowed.

CHAPTER SIX

The Enterprise was in night mode. Corridors were quiet, lights dimmed. On the Bridge the only sounds came from the science computers as they talked with clicks and burrs to one another. Sulu stifled a yawn and looked across to the communications station. Danials sat listening to sub-space chatter on his earphone. He smiled on meeting Sulu's gaze and said,

"Never mind, Sulu. Only another three hours until six."

"Yes, sure." Sulu yawned again. He had never been good at taking the night shift. He had been on the Enterprise since the beginning of the five-year mission and had only drawn the shift a few times; perhaps Spock knew how much he hated it.

Of course in space there was no real day and night, so the giant Starship adjusted the lighting automatically for the benefit of its crew.

In Sickbay Nurse Chapel tossed and turned on the duty bunk, the peace of sleep disturbed by a dream. At his desk Doctor McCoy watched as a smile crossed his Chief Nurse's face. Was she dreaming of that Vulcan again? She was besotted by that cold, unemotional pixie. McCoy wondered why. Spock never seemed to show Chapel any more attention than he did anyone else.

Why would a woman as good-looking and kind as she was waste her time mooning over Spock? With his strict cultural and moral codes nothing would ever come of it.

What a damn waste, McCoy mulled. What did the women find so irresistible? Whatever it was he wished he had it! Whenever Spock gave a lecture the room was always full of women gazing at him with rapt attention. Oh, how McCoy wished his nurses paid him the same regard.

The Captain too had his gang of admirers. McCoy was definitely feeling very sorry for himself! These early hours left too much time for thinking.

He had finished the last medical report in front of him and tossed it onto the large untidy pile that filled the box at his feet. Blast the damn things! Be a good job when the relay to the main computer was back on line. How long would it take that stupid Scotsman to find the fault?

Perhaps if he asked Spock to take a quick look? NO. McCoy rejected that idea. Nothing would make him ask Spock for help. He'd never hear the end of it!

He rubbed his tired eyes again and stood up on stiff legs. He wouldn't use the duty bed but go to his quarters. At least there he had less chance of being disturbed.

Crossing over to where Christine slept he picked up the bedcover she had tossed on the floor in her restless sleep and gently placed it back over her.

They had been busy checking the extra medical supplies taken on board from the supply craft. He just hoped there would be enough to replenish the stores lost on Rima 4. The fire had destroyed the medical complex. Bet it was those rats chewing through cables. It's happened before, McCoy thought to himself. No wonder Yates was going to try and smuggle a cat through.

It had been lucky for him there had been no patients that night. What with putting the supplies away and having to do the reports by hand the time had flown by.

The Sickbay ward was empty and as McCoy passed by the neat beds he wondered how long it would stay that way. He shuddered as the memory of the hours after the clash with the smugglers in the Mengen sector flashed to mind. He prayed they wouldn't have to experience anything like that again. After all, he was a doctor.... not a miracle worker. But miracles had been performed that day... at a price... Jim was still below par, his face pale and eyes tired.... And Spock? Well, who could tell with him?

McCoy made his weary way to the nearest turbo lift. Sensing his presence the doors opened just as he got there. It already had a passenger... there stood Spock - wide awake, smart, not a shining hair out of place.

McCoy felt like a bundle of rags.

An eyebrow rose in greeting. "Good morning, Doctor."

McCoy grunted as he entered the lift. "Might have known it would be you. Don't you ever sleep?"

Spock's head tilted to one side. "Of course, Doctor. All sentient beings need to rest. Although the Guimpters of Theta six may be the exception. I believe they..."

"Oh God!" McCoy gasped, "It's three in the morning and he STILL talks like a damn computer."

Spock stared. "I'm afraid I do not understand you, Doctor."

McCoy closed his eyes and leaned back against the lift wall. "You never will, Spock that's the trouble."

On his arrival on the Bridge Spock resumed his monitoring of his beloved computers. By six o' clock the Bridge had come alive. Yeomen dashed to and fro with coffee for crew who hadn't bothered to go to the canteen for breakfast. Chekov's voice broke through the clamour.

"Captain on the Bridge."

Eyes turned as Captain Kirk stepped out of the turbo lift and took his place at the con.

Almost immediately he was handed a report by his personal Yeoman, a tall woman called Joan Fleming.

"Shall I fetch your coffee, sir?"

"Yes. Black." A quick smile crossed the pale face. He swivelled the command chair and looked around the Bridge, eyes missing nothing.

The tall figure of Spock strode over to the Captain's chair. "Good morning, Captain. I trust you are well?"

"Yes, thank you, Spock. I enjoyed the chess game; can't say the same for the stuff Scotty gave me."

Spock's dark eyes glinted. "I believe it was brandy, Captain."

"Well, that's not what I would call it," Kirk said with real feeling. "Where's that coffee?"

As if in answer his Yeoman appeared at his side. "Your coffee, sir, and I took the liberty of asking Nurse Chapel for a headache pill. Shall I leave it with the coffee, sir?"

Kirk turned to stare at her. The sudden movement caused what seemed to him to be hundreds of little Klingons trying to split his skull. He felt sick. He wasn't sure if he was pleased or angry that his Yeoman was aware he was suffering from a hangover. Was it really that obvious? He tried to cover it up but his attempt to block the pain by repeating 'There is no pain' as Spock did when injured didn't work.

"Yes! Yes! Leave it..... Thank you." She smiled and moved away.

As Kirk swallowed the pill with liberal gulps of coffee he noticed that Spock, with his thin arms folded across his chest, definitely had an 'I told you so' look. The Captain gulped the last dregs of coffee and made himself the promise he had made so many times before and never managed to keep... NEVER AGAIN! After all after the last few weeks wasn't he due to unwind a bit? He was tired, drained of energy, and he wasn't the only one. Spock was too quiet and McCoy too snappy. Kirk said a silent prayer for just a short time when nothing happened; just long enough for them all to recharge their batteries... just a few weeks.... That wasn't too much to ask.... was it?

And so the morning moved into afternoon and the usual routine needed to run the Enterprise continued.

McCoy was back in Sickbay after a good, if short, sleep. The usual colds, cuts and bruises filled his time and he was just taking time to clean down the examination table when Scott came in.

"Yes? What is it, Scotty?"

"Just came to let you know the computer is okay now, Doc. Ye shouldna have any more trouble. We even managed to save the records from being wiped."

McCoy gripped Scotty by the hand in gratitude. "Scotty, I owe you a drink. Thank you. You're brilliant."

"Well, that's very nice o' ye, Doctor but tae be perfectly honest it wasnae me."

"What do you mean?" McCoy asked.

"Well, I was stumped. I really was so I asked Mr Spock tae take a wee look."

"WHAT!" McCoy bellowed.

"Yes. If ye want to thank anyone it should be Mr Spock. He worked most of last night on it."

McCoy was like a goldfish; his mouth was working but no sound came. No way would he thank that block of ice. If he did Spock would produce some smart-alec answer.

Meanwhile up on the Bridge Uhura listened to the message coming in from far space, a look of concern on her face. She swung her chair to position herself with a view of Mr Spock, who was busy bent over his console with his back towards her, before she turned to face Captain Kirk.

"Sir?"

He looked up from his reports.

She continued, "I've just monitored a sub-space message, very faint."

"What is the message, Lieutenant?" Kirk asked brusquely, eager to get back to the reports.

"Sir, the source is unknown but it's reporting increasingly severe weather on the planet Vulcan. Electrical and dust storms with considerable stratospheric disturbances - there has been a report of high loss of life, sir." Her eyes flickered to Spock. "I thought you would want to know, sir."

Kirk dropped the report he was holding and made his way to the science station. Spock stood gazing into the scanner as if he was unaware of the conversation, but Kirk knew that the Vulcan's acute hearing made that impossible.

"Spock, have there been storms like this before on Vulcan?" He asked quietly.

"Assuming the report to be correct, Captain, yes. Not within living memory, however, and not to the extent that they affected the stratosphere. Records only detail dust and electrical storms, therefore I suspect there may be an outside influence responsible."

"Such as?"

"Insufficient data, Captain."

"Not in living memory? How long is that?"

"The average Vulcan lifespan is approximately two hundred and fifty of your Earth years, Captain."

Kirk nodded. "We are a good distance from that sector. Would you like Uhura to try to contact your parents and find out if they are okay?"

Spock stood up straight and turned to face Kirk. "Not necessary, Captain. I'm sure the

Elders would have had ample time to warn the people of the approach of such harsh weather."

Captain Kirk was not convinced by his First Officer's calm answer. "In that case, Spock, why is there a high loss of life reported?"

Spock didn't answer, just pulled his lips into a tight line.

"Well," Kirk continued, "if you change your mind and want a message sent, you have full clearance. Did you hear that, Uhura?"

"Yes, sir. Mr Spock to have full clearance."

Spock calmly bent back over his scanner and continued to work but inside he felt uneasy.

Kirk wondered just what it would take to make Spock admit he was worried over his parents' safety. He ordered a message to Starfleet Command reporting the storms and requesting immediate help.

Spock seemed unmoved by it all but inside he was fighting a strong desire to beg Jim to get him home. Perhaps when the Bridge was quiet during the next night mode he would try to contact Vulcan himself. He did not want to attempt it now, with the whole Bridge crew watching him, in case the news was bad and his control failed him.

Ever since the confrontation with the water smugglers he had been aware his defences were stretched to the limit. Two of his best science trainees had been killed within feet of him. One had taken minutes to die in an agony that even Spock couldn't relieve. The Vulcan glanced down at the healed scars on his hands, remembering the struggle to free himself from the twisted metal. He had been too late to be of any help to the trainees who were trapped in the jumble of debris which only seconds before had been a well-ordered science lab.

It was not logical to use energy on anxiety over things he could not control and could not change. He returned to complete the scan and record his findings.

During the following hours the Captain tried several times to offer his support, doing it in such subtle ways so as not to attract the attention of the rest of the crew, knowing it was painful for his First Officer to be the centre of attention.

CHAPTER SEVEN

The day shift was at last replaced by the reduced in size night shift. The lights dimmed to a low level, only the Bridge remaining fully lit. Many stations were unmanned. As the Enterprise was travelling through what was considered 'safe' space, and Captain Kirk was taking every opportunity to rest his battle-weary crew, he had stood down as many crew as possible, leaving only Helm and Security on full strength.

The giant Starship had now finished her mission in this sector; the collected information was being processed before they moved on to deliver replacement medical supplies to Rima 4. Spock was still working, engrossed in the results of tests carried out on samples of a grain that seemed to survive without the need of water.

After a while he left his station and casually walked to the communications console. Uhura's replacement was Ensign Adams, a large Scot. His blue eyes left the panel to meet Spock's black ones. "Commander?"

"Go and get yourself a coffee, Ensign. I shall monitor the radio whilst you are away." Spock spoke casually. The man looked a little uncertain but did not want to miss the chance of a break.

"Very well, sir. Thank you."

Spock placed his receiver in his ear ready to take over Adams' station. He waited until the Ensign had left the Bridge before patching into the Vulcan frequency. All he got was static. Long, nimble fingers ran across the keys searching for a sub-space beam that would bypass onto a clearer wavelength.

Time passed.

Nothing at all. Then, just as Spock was about to admit defeat, a faint sound, inaudible to Human ears.

It was Vulcan. A voice; rapid, pleading, panic in its tone.

Spock was surprised that so much emotion was clear in the voice. More cries, then ...

SILENCE

Spock remained calm. After an unbearable time he made contact again. By now Sulu, sitting at the Helm, was beginning to wonder what was going on. He turned to watch and listen.

Commander Spock was bent low over the console and was talking in rapid Vulcan. At least Sulu assumed it to be Vulcan; without a universal translator he couldn't understand what was being said, but he noted Spock's body sag at one point. It was as though all the strength had been drained out of him. The conversation was short, hurried and interrupted several times by static. When contact was finally lost Spock rose gracefully from the station in one lithe movement. Sulu quickly turned back to the Helm, not wanting Spock to know he had been watching.

Adams arrived back moments later. "Anything, Mr. Spock?"

"No. Nothing for the Enterprise," Spock answered calmly, but Sulu saw the tremor in the pale hands.

By the time the day shift reported for duty Sulu had almost forgotten the incident. Then as he queued up in the rec room for coffee he saw Spock quietly enter and make his way not to his usual table, but to a rather secluded corner one. Having collected his coffee Sulu dialled up a fruit juice then, plucking up his courage, made his way to the First Officer's table.

"Excuse me, Mr Spock. I wonder if I might join you?"

Spock's thoughts drifted back to when Jim had first used that strange Human phrase. It seemed so long ago. He indicated the empty chair beside him.

"As you will, Mr Sulu." He didn't seem bothered one way or the other.

Sulu sat and pushed the fruit juice in front of the Vulcan. "I hope you won't mind, sir. I thought you might like a drink after so long on duty."

Spock looked hard at Sulu, his dark eyes unblinking. Sulu swallowed. He had known Spock a long time but he still wasn't sure how the First Officer would react. Would he see it as an offer of kindness or interference? He had never noticed how dark Spock's eyes were before, or how alien. They gave no trace of his Human half at all.

"Thank you, Mr Sulu."

Sulu breathed again as Spock slowly sipped the juice. "It's been a long night, sir," he stated, as much to break the silence as to state a fact.

"Yes, indeed."

"I shall be glad to get some sleep."

Spock placed the fruit juice carefully back on the table. "Then I recommend you do so as soon as possible, Mr Sulu. Do not let me delay you."

"No, Mr Spock. I enjoy the chance of a chat." Sulu didn't want to sound too inquisitive but felt that perhaps Spock would like someone to talk to, so he said,

"What's going on, sir? How are things on Vulcan? I heard..."

Spock's expression never altered but Sulu thought he was too rigid, too constrained as he whispered,

"Really, Mr Sulu? What have you heard?"

Sulu suddenly felt trapped on a ledge of his own making, with nowhere to go. "Well ... I ..." He was saved by the arrival of Captain Kirk.

"Ah... There you are, Mr Spock. Mind if I sit down?"

Sulu rose like a jack-in-a-box. "Here, have my seat, sir. I was just leaving." A quick nod to Spock and Sulu was gone. The Captain watched his Helmsman disappear, then turned to Spock.

"What's got into Mr Sulu?" Kirk asked.

"I have no idea, Jim."

"I hear you didn't finish your shift until this morning. You were due off at nine. What kept you? You know I want everyone to have as much off-duty time as possible after Mengen."

Spock didn't answer so Kirk continued. "Have you been in touch with Vulcan yet?"

Spock knew he wouldn't be able to hide anything for long from Jim Kirk. The man knew him too well.

"Yes, Jim. I made contact last night. Things are not good. It seems the storms cover a large area and inter-planet travel is impossible." He sounded drained. "The death toll is rising.

Many are dying of asphyxia because the dust is choking them. The electrical disturbances are making travel and communications impossible."

Kirk knew his friend must be worried although his face gave no sign of the inner turmoil. "How are your parents? Have you heard?"

Spock stared at the polished table top. "The storm around Shikahr makes it impossible to contact anyone within a two-hundred mile radius. However I managed to speak with the emergency council based on the other side of the Kalisfa Desert. They believe my father is away on a diplomatic mission to Delta Seven." There was a slight pause. "My mother is alone at Shikahr."

Kirk reached across and gripped Spock's hand. It was an automatic action to convey solace and he immediately drew back, knowing Vulcans didn't like to be touched.

"Don't worry, Spock. As soon as your father hears he'll get back to Amanda."

Spock looked up, "I believe even at warp speed he will not get back for several weeks. By then" His deep voice trailed off.

Kirk stood up. He looked down at his friend. "Do you want to redirect the Enterprise to Vulcan?" he asked earnestly.

Spock breathed deeply. "Jim, you cannot do that ... I cannot ask it of you... Risk over four hundred lives for lives that may already be lost... NO! But I thank you."

Kirk had seldom heard Spock express thanks. He sat back down. "But Spock, someone must do something... I know - I'll contact Starfleet. They may already be setting up a rescue mission."

Spock looked unconvinced. "Jim, we are the nearest ship to the Eridani system and we have not been contacted, as yet, by the Fleet. I doubt they know; if they do, they should hold back until the storms disperse. No, I believe we must wait."

Kirk said, with anger in his voice, "You don't think Starfleet would just sit back and wait while all those people die? More than likely, Uhura will be in touch with them at this very minute."

"It will be pointless to risk Starships while the cause of the disturbances is unknown, Jim. It is not just the planetary surface, the space around Vulcan is also affected."

"It won't be pointless, Spock, if we can save lives. Just by being there we will give them hope... especially your mother. I'm sure we can do something. Now go! I don't want to see you for twenty-four hours at least. Sleep."

Spock went to say more but Kirk pointed to the door.

"GO! That's an order."

One person in the rec room, sitting a few tables away, had strained to hear the conversation between the Captain and First Officer; Ensign Yates. He still nursed intense feelings of hatred, fuelled by the recent transfer of his brother. He turned to the others sharing his table.

"Did you hear that? The Captain is going to re-route to Vulcan, that hot hell, just to save a lot of robots. After all we've been through... that damn First Officer used his friendship with the Captain to get the ship at his beck and call."

A young ensign from Security shook his head. "Don't be daft, Yates. The Captain is his own man. Even if Mr Spock asked him to do such a thing on the strength of their friendship, he would only do what he thought was right for the Enterprise."

Yates glared at him, reached across the table and gripped the tunic top, pulling the ensign over the table top till they were face to face.

"Are you a robot lover then? Come on. Tell us. Are you? Are you?" His voice rose almost to a scream, spittle dripped down his chin, his eyes were wide and staring. Phillips pulled him back, to the relief of the Security ensign, who as soon as he was free of the ranting Yates stood and made a hasty exit.

"Calm down, Yates." Phillips crooned. "It's not worth getting a transfer for. Is it?"

Yates smoothed his tunic top and wiped his chin. "Get out of my way!" He pushed his chair back with a scrape and stormed off.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Spock returned to his quarters and was welcomed by the sound of purring. Strange, he thought, that at a time when he found it so hard to gain comfort from Jim's well intentioned words that a small creature could fill that need. He picked up Max, who had wrapped herself around Spock's legs, and held the cat. As a warm tongue flicked around the Vulcan's long finger Spock buried his face in the long fur.

Meanwhile, true to his word, Kirk had gone to Uhura and a patch was put through to Starfleet Command. Admiral Komack had, as Kirk expected, already heard from Uhura about the storms on and around Vulcan. Ships were on their way but time was against them.

Komack said that reports of increasing loss of life were coming in hourly. If the storms continued unabated several cities, including Shikahr, would be devoid of life in less than a month. Uhura confirmed that she too had been intercepting similar messages from the parts of Vulcan that had escaped the worst of the weather. It seemed nothing could be done until things settled down. The electrical storms were affecting the use of shuttles and Kirk suspected they would also make transporter use a severe risk. The only good thing he found out from Komack was that Spock's father, an important Ambassador, had been informed of the events on Vulcan and was on his way back. There would be little he could do but at least Spock would not be alone if and when they found Amanda.

Kirk sighed; Spock was his special friend. That friendship had taken a long and difficult time to forge. Kirk had had to cross the barriers Spock had built around himself to prevent his Human feelings from showing to others; feelings he was afraid would undermine his Vulcan teachings.

Spock had been cold, precise, unemotional and still was to most of the crew. Only a few people who had close contact with the Science Officer knew the other side of Spock; the gentle, shy, sensitive, inhibited... Human... Spock.

Kirk had seen Spock in all sorts of situations, and he had come through them all, but could he cope with this? Spock's rift with his father had been partly healed during the trip to Babel. However, although they were on speaking terms things were far from the relationship he would expect between father and son.

Spock's mother had told Kirk the rift had lasted for over eighteen years. A long time for Spock to be treated as an exile. During that time his mother, Amanda, had been his only link with his home. She alone had loved and supported Spock during his ostracism, never giving up hope that father and son would one day resolve their differences. Against her husband's wishes she had tried to keep in touch with Spock, passing him bits of news about his world. Kirk knew how much her letters had meant to his friend during the lonely years that followed his entry into Starfleet.

Kirk made up his mind and, after a final talk with Komack, directed the Helmsman to put the Enterprise on course for Vulcan, warp speed seven. The Engineering Officer contacted the Bridge at once to confirm the change in speed. Scott was surprised; he had long ago learned not to argue with the Captain over the wisdom of using high warp speeds over long periods, but his beloved engines were barely recovered from the battering they had received during the fight with the water smugglers.

Spock felt the change of course and surge of power as he entered the sleeping quarters of his cabin. Max purring at his heels. If Spock hadn't been so concerned for his mother and the safety of his planet a smile might have found its way to his pale face.

He found meditation impossible while his mind was in so much turmoil, so he decided to try to sleep instead. As he lay stretched, fully clothed, on the bunk, staring at the shadows that danced across the ceiling, caused by the flickering flame of the fire-pot, the cat settled herself across his chest, pushing her head into the crook of Spock's arm. The last sounds Spock heard before sleep overcame him were the steady purrs of Max and the faint drone of the Enterprise's engines.

He woke after thirty minutes. Longer, deeper sleep was impossible while his mind was constantly returning to thoughts of Vulcan. Spock gazed at the fire-pot, thinking of his home. The low white house was clear in his mind and his mother, as he had so often thought of her over the last eighteen years, arranging roses in the large silver vase... No! Sleep was impossible so he just lay there resting his body, controlling his breathing and heart-rate.

If the storms of dust were really as bad as he feared his mother would have surely sought refuge in the small repository his father had had built under his study. In times of danger when he was a small child this was where his parents had hidden him.

It was the safest part of the house, protected by thick stone walls. Stores of food and water were replenished at regular intervals. Since his father's career had taken him into high diplomatic position Sarek had been well aware of the possible risks to his family and had taken the necessary precautions to keep them safe if needs be.

Vulcan's climate was one of extremes; hot, baking days and cold nights, so the deep stone room was often used as a playroom for the baby Spock, thus ensuring the child was not exposed to the extremes of temperature.

Sandstorms were common on the planet but never had he known such electrical disturbances. They might herald a complete change in Vulcan's weather patterns, perhaps making the planet uninhabitable. He could only hope they were a solitary fluctuation which would right itself given time ... but how much time?

As a scientist Spock was eager to find out what was going on but his curiosity was edged with fear. He had rarely known this emotion and he did not like it.... Did Jim, as a Human, feel this? Using all his Vulcan disciplines, Spock found he still could not rid himself of it entirely. Another sign of the Human blood elements that had hindered him throughout his life.

Jim Kirk sat at the con of the Enterprise. He was thinking back to how he had tried to explain to Komack the reasons for wanting to change course for Vulcan. He was sure Komack had only grudgingly agreed because of Spock's father's important position. He'd said that Starfleet had already committed four Starships to Vulcan and that was adequate until the position became clearer. However, Kirk had pointed out the terrible effect on Vulcan/Federation relations if all that could be done to rescue survivors from the worst hit regions of the planet was not seen to be done, especially as the Enterprise was so close.

Komack's reply had been that he wanted the Enterprise to avoid problematical situations after being involved in action with such a high loss of life. Kirk had shouted, "What are we here for? What's the point of every time it looks like trouble we stand by and only choose to involve ourselves if there is no risk?"

Komack had conceded gracefully.

As Kirk watched Sulu run his fingers over the status board his thoughts returned to Spock. The Captain knew if their positions were reversed Spock would not hesitate to help him or his family, whatever the cost to his career. The strain was already beginning to show itself on the Vulcan's lean face. How long could he keep that iron Vulcan control when his home city was in danger of annihilation? How would he, Kirk, cope if it were Earth and not Vulcan? He knew he wouldn't be so calm in that situation.

The crew of a Starship was like any other group of people enclosed in a tight environment a long way from their homes where news, any news, was a rare commodity. The gossips worked overtime and soon there couldn't have been anyone on board who had not heard of the storms on Vulcan and of the real danger to the ship as she approached the volatile planet. They were divided into two groups; those who wanted to help the victims in any way they could and a smaller group who tended to follow Ensign Yates in his resentment that their lives were to be put at risk 'for a bunch of aliens'. However by the third day this group had begun to tire of hearing his increasingly bitter moans and groans and many of his followers deserted him. This left a hard core consisting of Phillips and two others, and they followed out of fear rather than respect or agreement.

The continuous travel at high warp speeds had taken its toll on the dilithium crystals, and Scott was making hourly reports to the Captain as to their condition and the effect on his beloved engines. Kirk knew that with her already weakened condition the Enterprise would find it hard to manoeuvre quickly out of trouble if it should arise, but the plight of the people of Vulcan and Spock's constrained face drove him on. The First Officer had spent several hours trying to persuade Kirk to change his mind and give up all idea of a rescue mission, but Kirk would not listen to his entreaties.

McCoy had been to see the Captain with his concern at the visible deterioration in Spock. There had been a terrible scene in Sickbay as McCoy tried to reason with Spock. He'd tried and failed to trigger a loss of temper - anything to release the pent-up emotions that seemed to be draining the First Officer's energy at a rapid rate - but Spock was having none of that. Instead it had been the Doctor who'd ended up the one to lose his temper. His raised voice had been heard all over the deck as he tried to invoke a response from Spock - any response - and failed. The First Officer had been at his 'most Vulcan' and had walked away calmly without saying a word.

Kirk was beginning to think the voyage to Vulcan was a far worse nightmare than anything they would find on their arrival.

The evening after the confrontation in Sickbay McCoy was alone in his quarters trying to get the top off a bottle of brandy. It was resisting all his efforts.

"Stubborn! Just like that damn Vulcan!" he muttered as he pulled and tugged in vain. There was a light tap on the door. McCoy muttered to himself,

"Must be Jim, come for a nightcap. Well, he'll be lucky! Unless he can get this stupid top off." He pressed the door release. It wasn't the Captain. Spock stood there.

"Oh. It's only you," McCoy said with a grumpiness he didn't really feel.

"Yes, Doctor. May I enter?"

"Yes, yes! Don't just stand there! There's a draught. Either come or go but make up your mind." McCoy turned back to the problem of the brandy top.

Spock watched him struggle for several moments without comment before quietly asking, "May I be of assistance, Doctor?" Spock then reached for the bottle, took it from McCoy and opened it with no effort at all.

"HUH!" McCoy glared at the blank, pale face. "Well you didn't come here just to open my bottle. What do you want? There's a duty nurse in Sickbay, you know. I'm off duty."

Spock pointed to a chair. "May I sit down, Doctor?"

"Going to take that long?" McCoy snapped.

Spock wasn't too sure if this was a question or, as he learned, the Human way of making a statement sound like one. He decided that the logical thing to do was to ignore it. He sat stiff-backed for several minutes as McCoy poured himself a very large drink, larger than he would have normally... but this hadn't been a normal day.

"Doctor, I am here to tell you that I understand your concern for my welfare but I can assure you that I am fully functional at this time."

McCoy looked up from his glass and peered at the Vulcan with his blue eyes. He missed nothing; the dark eyes with a dullness not often seen, the paler than usual skin.

"Oh? You are, are you? Since when have you been the Doctor on this ship?"

Spock's shoulders visibly sagged although his expression remained void. McCoy faced the First Officer; his voice softened, their long-standing feud forgotten. His heart ached to ease the pain that was undoubtedly locked deep inside the painfully thin figure.

"Spock, can't you see...? No, I suppose you don't. It's precisely because you're talking that way - like a damn computer - that I'm so concerned. FOR GOD'S SAKE, MAN! Your mother may be dead, your home world ruined, and you're acting as if it's just another day!"

McCoy's temper was coming to the fore again and he knew it, but couldn't control it. He saw a flicker in Spock's eyes and knew he'd gone too far this time. He took another swig of the brandy. It seemed to have lost its taste.

Spock's voice was barely a whisper. "It is precisely because of the high probability that... my mother may... is dead... that I must remain as I am, Doctor."

"Goddamn it, Spock! You're half Human! Look at you. It's killing you, bit by bit. Why? Just tell me why?" McCoy shouted.

"Because, if my mother is indeed dead, my father will need me," was the answer, spoken with that same quiet voice devoid of any emotion. "And he requires a son able to support him in a true Vulcan way... not an emotional half-breed unable to function due to Human grief."

McCoy was taken aback. There was no sign of bitterness in Spock's voice. It was the first time the Doctor had heard Spock refer to himself as a half-breed.

Spock continued, "My father does not consider me to be a son to be proud of, Doctor. Perhaps I did not live up to his expectations of me... but I will not fail him now."

McCoy looked at his boots, unable to meet the unfathomable dark eyes that somehow seemed to plead for understanding. Spock tried to explain.

"On Vulcan the loss of a bondmate can often prove fatal to the partner. It is at this time the eldest child becomes responsible for them. Should the parent expire the child is responsible for the Katra until it is placed in the Hall of Ancient Thought."

McCoy didn't understand the Vulcan ritual but was searching for something to say when the door admittance light flashed and he moved to press the door release. Captain Kirk entered.

On seeing their serious faces he said, "Is everything all right, gentlemen?"

Spock rose. "Of course, Captain. The Doctor has just agreed that I am well able to carry out my duties without assistance from his department."

McCoy felt the dark, penetrating gaze turn in his direction, an unspoken challenge for the Doctor to contradict him. Kirk looked at the ship's Doctor, who dumbly nodded assent. Spock left without another word, leaving Kirk and McCoy staring after him. Kirk liked to know everything that was going on aboard the Enterprise and he wasn't satisfied with Spock's assurances. He turned to McCoy, who was busy pouring two brandies.

"Bones, what's been going on?" he asked. They both sat down.

"Oh, Jim. I tackled Spock about his emotional attitude in the present situation ... but it didn't go according to plan," he ended meekly.

Kirk said, "Why, Bones? I mean, why try to do that? You know Spock would rather die than express his feelings in public. You should know that!"

"Yes, I know, but the man is on a knife edge. Surely, as his friend, you can see that too?"

"Yes, of course I can. What did Spock say?"

McCoy sighed, "Well, he says if his mother is dead he must keep up his control for his father's sake."

Kirk was amazed. "But he and his father are hardly on speaking terms even now."

McCoy nodded. "I know, I know, but your Vulcan friend is loyal to the bitter end. Even after all those years of neglect and disownment. I really don't think I can do anything to help him as long as that stubborn Vulcan thinks like that."

Kirk understood how powerless the Doctor felt. "Spock is an honourable man, Bones. Loyal to the death if need be. Look how he risked everything for Pike, and from what I've heard Pike had rather treated him as just an extension of the computer. If Spock has had differences with Sarek he still holds him up as a role model... the perfect Vulcan! Something Spock has always striven so hard to be." Kirk swallowed some brandy, his 'never again' forgotten.

"Spock's attempts at being more Vulcan than Vulcan are just his way of trying to prove himself worthy in his father's eyes. No matter what Spock says, deep down he really craves parental approval. You have no idea what a terribly lonely life he has had. We are two of the few people he has ever let get close to him."

Bones went to interrupt but Kirk carried on, "No. You're wrong if you think he doesn't care about you. I know he enjoys his arguments with you, Bones. You are very special to him."

McCoy swigged at his brandy, suddenly feeling very sad.

Kirk continued forcefully, "He has always been there for us and the Enterprise. This is our chance to be there for him. No matter what."

"Yes, I think you're right, Jim. Even if he doesn't want us to."

"Oh, I think he does, Bones. He just can't be seen to ask."

"That damn Vulcan pride." McCoy took another swig. "You know something, Jim? Something I wouldn't say to anyone else? I need that stubborn Vulcan as much as he needs me."

CHAPTER NINE

When Spock reached Science Lab 4 he was met by a distressed Ensign.

"Mr Spock, I'm sorry, sir, I really am. I can't think how it happened."

Spock quietly walked over to a corner, beckoning the Ensign to follow. "Now, Mr Reeves, tell me what has happened."

"It's that last batch of findings from Galina. We've lost them."

Spock knew weeks of hard work had been involved in producing the data required by Starfleet. It had been transferred to disc ready to be sent back in the next forty-eight hours. His voice remained calm.

"Lost it? Please clarify."

"The discs, sir. They've been wiped clean. It must have been an accident."

Without answering Spock made his way to a console and tapped in a code. Then he waited and tried again. Reeves watched the long, nimble fingers.

"Did you make copies, sir?" he asked hopefully.

"I did, Mr Reeves, but it seems they too have been 'accidentally' wiped clean." He turned to the red-faced spotty Human, knowing the boy was fearful of the repercussions of his discovery. "It is all right, Ensign. The discs were entirely my responsibility. You are excused. Perhaps you would care to assist Mr Mitsu? He needs the help a quick mind such as yours can give."

Reeves smiled. "Thank you, Mr Spock."

Spock began the long business of recalling to memory all the lost work and then entering it onto disc again. He had forty-eight hours. He calculated that if he went without rest periods and meals he would be able to replace all the missing data in time for the scheduled transmission to Fleet HQ. His brilliant mind gave no thought as to who had been responsible for the 'accident'.

Forty-six hours later, the discs were handed to Uhura for relaying to Starfleet. The Communications Officer looked up and the smile died on her face as she saw the change in the First Officer's appearance.

"Are you all right, sir?" she asked.

He stood up straighter and she noted the clenching of his jaw muscles. "I am a little fatigued, Lieutenant."

The Captain, who had been talking to Sulu, turned and gazed at Spock as the Vulcan moved to his station. For Spock to admit to any physical weakness was unusual, to say the least. When Sulu had finished his conversation with the Captain, Kirk made his way to Spock.

"Spock, why don't you go off duty early? We won't be in Vulcan space for a while yet. Get some rest while you can."

The Science Officer turned from the console and his eyes met Kirk's. "There is no need, sir. I am well able to complete my shift." His voice was firm and determined.

"Very well, Mr Spock. Carry on."

The Vulcan lowered his dark eyes in acknowledgement and turned back to his computers.

The giant Starship approached Vulcan at warp one. Kirk had reduced speed as a safety measure. As the large red orb of Vulcan came into view he ordered Sulu to bring the ship down to sublight. Almost as he finished giving the order the deck lurched beneath his feet as the ship was rocked like a child's toy. Crewmembers caught unawares were thrown across the Bridge like rag dolls. One young Ensign landed at Kirk's feet.

"I'm sorry, sir," he stammered as he scrambled to his feet, only to fall again as another shock wave hit the Enterprise. Kirk had to shout to make himself heard above the wail of the red alert.

"All injured report to Sickbay. Smith, Gordino, help any that can't walk. Everybody else

man your stations."

Spock had moved to stand beside him as he tended to do when there was any danger. In his calm voice he said, "Captain, that shift in our position was due to an energy wave. I believe it is also responsible for the anomaly in the planet's weather. I suggest we move no closer at this time."

The Captain had no chance to answer before another terrific blow hit the ship. It sent Spock toppling to land in a heap near Chekov's feet. The First Officer picked himself up carefully and in answer to Kirk's unspoken query said, "I am uninjured, Captain."

Kirk looked around the Bridge to make sure all the injured had been taken to Sickbay for treatment. He pressed the command intercom that was set in the arm of the module.

"Kirk to Sickbay."

"Yes, Captain," Nurse Chapel answered.

"What is your status, Nurse?"

"All under control, sir. Doctor McCoy and Doctor M'Benga are in theatre. Broken bones, cuts, nothing life threatening."

"Right! Tell McCoy I'd like a full report as soon as he can spare the time. Thank you, Nurse."

"Kirk to Engineering. Scotty?"

There was a slight pause, then, "Sir?"

"Scotty, what's going on down there? Damage report."

"Ah, sir. No' too bad as far as the ship's concerned. More trouble with the lads than the ship. Phillips is trapped under a load o' metal and there's a hell of a lot of fire down here. The heat is making it hard tae get tae him Just heard, sir. Fire's out ... but everything's so hot. There's not much chance for the laddie, sir."

At this Spock said, "Captain, permission to go and assess the situation in Engineering."

"Okay, Spock. Report as soon as you can." Then back to Scott, "Mr Spock is on his way down to you."

"Right, sir. May I suggest we move off from the planet, sir? The ship's took a fair ol' battering; shook loose a few o' her rivets. I canna be sure how she'd be if we take any more."

Kirk gave the order to Sulu to reverse to a safe distance. He then stood the ship down from the red alert.

Spock reached the Engineering section and found organised chaos. Thick, black, acrid smoke hung in the air and twisted metal blocked his path. Out of the darkness he heard the voice of Scott calmly ordering his men to get to the survival lockers and don air filters before continuing the rescue of the trapped man.

With his Vulcan strength Spock was able to remove most of the distorted metal that

blocked his way. On reaching the main control room he took in the situation at a glance.

Scott and four of his men were trying to pull a large section of bulkhead out of the way. As they worked screams could be heard from the pile under the heavy glowing sheet.

Spock moved closer and saw the work was not progressing due to the fact the Humans could not work for long without backing away from the heat of the glowing metal. Their heat resistant gloves were torn by the jagged edges of the twisted metal. The screams continued to vibrate around the dim, smoky room. Scott turned and smiled at the sight of the Vulcan.

"Mr Spock, d'ye think ye might be able tae gie us a hand?"

Spock took hold of the bulkhead section and, ignoring the heat, pulled with all his might. As the section lifted Scott wedged a long splinter under it and Spock slowly lowered the section, praying the wedge would hold. There were loud groans as the wedge began to bow. Spock looked across to the smoke-blackened face of Scott. They waited with bated breath. The wedge held.

Spock moved to the gap underneath and shouted, "Mr Phillips. Can you hear me?"

There was a silence for what seemed an endless time, then, "Here. Help me, please..."

Spock turned to Scott. "I shall crawl in and endeavour to release Mr Phillips. If I am successful I shall need assistance to pull him free."

"We'll be ready, Mr Spock. Good luck, sir."

Spock sank to his knees. As his hands touched the deck pain shot up his arms. He looked down to find his palms had blistered badly. Using his shields to block the pain Spock began to crawl beneath the heavy sheet of hot metal. He moved carefully, an arm, a leg at a time further and further into the jumble of tangled steel, wires and plastic, his eyes searching every inch until he saw the face of Phillips with tears of pain running down his blackened cheeks. The First Officer saw that a piece of plastic was wedged across Phillips' chest, effectively holding him down. Phillips was close to passing out.

Spock moved closer and gently said, "Mr Phillips. Can you hear me? If so, can you feel your legs?"

Phillips' eyes swivelled to focus on the Vulcan. "Help me."

"Can you move at all?"

The Ensign shook his head slowly. "I'm numb."

"Do not despair. I shall try to remove this from your legs. I shall count to three. Be prepared for some discomfort. One, two, three." Spock tugged, using every ounce of his strength. The muscles in his shoulders screamed protest. Slowly and surely the plastic began to move. At the same time there were loud creaks and groans from the surrounding debris. Scott's voice filtered through to them.

"For heaven's sake, be careful, Mr Spock. The Captain will kill me if anything happens to his First Officer."

"Please, Mr Scott, be ready to assist in a moment."

Scott wiped the beads of sweat from his face. The minutes ticked by. The air scrubbers began to whirl into action. Scott turned and shouted, "Well done, lads." An Ensign came over to his officer.

"Sir, everyone except Phillips is accounted for. There's a grav stretcher and medic team waiting. All fires are out. The scrubbers are operative."

"Well done, laddie. Stay here and be ready tae gie Mr Spock a hand."

Almost as Scott finished speaking Spock's black hair appeared from under the still glowing sheet metal. As Spock edged further out Scott and the Ensign held his shoulders and pulled gently. Like a baby being helped into the world first Spock and then the bloody body of Phillips emerged from the hot hell, and not a moment too soon. With a screaming crash the bulkhead collapsed, crushing everything beneath.

Within seconds the medics were tending to Phillips. He was lifted onto the grav stretcher. As Spock passed by on his way back to the Bridge Phillips snatched at his sleeve.

"Mr Spock... I ...

"No thanks are necessary, Ensign. Just recover quickly."

"I can't without thanking you, sir. You saved my life."

"Thanks are really not necessary, Mr Phillips. Anyone would have done the same. It was just that as I am able to tolerate higher levels of heat than Humans, I was the most suited to get you out." The voice was emotionless. He turned to Scott.

"I trust you will have this debris cleared away as soon as possible, Mr Scott?"

"At once, sir."

"Good. Please be good enough to report the exact damage and estimated time of repair to the Captain as soon as possible."

Scott muttered under his breath until Spock said quietly, "Well done, Mr Scott."

Scott grinned from ear to ear. "Yes, sir."

Phillips' injuries were not serious and after two hours he lay in the recovery room, his scorched skin covered in healing gel. Nurse Chapel came across to his bed.

"Is there anything I can get you, Ensign? A drink or a reading tape?"

"No thanks, Nurse."

"Well, if you're feeling up to it, you have a visitor."

"Who?"

"Mr Yates. He asked to see you but I can send him away if you're tired. The drugs Doctor McCoy gave you may make you drowsy."

"No, it's okay. I'll see him."

"Very well, but just call if you need me to curtail his visit."

Yates strolled across to the bed and stood gazing down at his fellow Ensign. "Well, you look a mess."

"Thanks a lot, but I guess I'm lucky to be here at all. If it wasn't for Mr Spock I'd have been fried turkey by now."

Yates' face clouded. He leaned down over the bed, his face inches from Phillips'.

"What the hell are you talking about? If it wasn't for that damn Vulcan and his rescue mission we wouldn't have been here in the first place! Can't you see? This is all his fault."

Phillips looked into the wide staring eyes, unable to answer, knowing it would fall on deaf ears. Yates continued,

"And it isn't over yet! You wait and see. We'll all be sent down into that hell hole, and what for? To rescue those machines so they can spread all over the galaxy and take over."

Phillips had had enough. "Yates, that's rubbish! I don't know why you keep going on just because...." He stopped, frightened to invoke the terrible anger he knew lay just below the surface of Yates' thin veneer of sanity.

"Just because of...? ... What?" Yates spat out.

A quiet voice interrupted him. "I think Mr Phillips needs to get some sleep now. Will you please leave?"

Yates spun round to face Nurse Chapel. "What? I haven't finished."

"Please leave."

He moved towards her. Just then the Sickbay door slid open. With terrified eyes Chapel looked across to the door. "Oh. Mr Spock." There was relief in her voice.

"Nurse," he acknowledged her in his deep tone.

She instantly moved from the bed to stand nearer to the First Officer and away from Yates.

"I believe you are needed in Engineering, Ensign," Spock said smoothly.

Yates glowered at the First Officer but left without another word. Phillips lay back against the pillow and breathed a sigh of relief. He'd been convinced there would be a confrontation. Spock looked down at Chapel.

"Nurse, are you all right? You look a little perturbed."

She looked up into the dark eyes, hoping to read something in their depths, but could see nothing except unblinking expressionless scrutiny.

"I'm all right, Mr Spock."

"In that case please resume your duties."

"Yes, sir."

The First Officer returned to the Bridge and reported all was now under control in the Engineering section without loss of life. Kirk felt a surge of relief. He would have hated to lose any more crew after the last mission. He turned to the Communication station.

"Uhura, try and patch me through to Vulcan Emergency Control. Any way you can."

"Yes, sir." She put her ear receiver in place. The slight hum of static crackled as she switched across channels in a bid to lose the interference. Her fingers danced over the keys in a well-practised way.

Spock had returned to his Science station and was collecting the latest data from his scanners.

"Captain, I shall be in Science Lab 3 or 6 should you need me." He rose, a tall figure forever smart in his blue uniform. It was a fact, no matter what dire effect overtook the Enterprise Spock always appeared unruffled, his uniform immaculate.

As he watched the Vulcan enter the turbolift Kirk couldn't help wondering if he was going to the labs to escape from having to watch the red planet on the main viewscreen. Even from this distance the swirls of red dust could be clearly seen interlaced by fierce cracks of electrical discharges. As the true ferocity of the storms became more and more apparent he took the crew up to yellow alert. In all his years aboard Starships Kirk had never seen anything like it.

Firmly he put his mind back on how to approach the planet safely. He decided that until the storms died it was just too risky, but how many lives would be lost in the meantime? He ordered the ship to continue to stand off at a safe distance and to hold that position until further orders.

Uhura reported that contact with Vulcan was impossible. Kirk ordered all channels kept open just in case there was an improvement in conditions.

Three days passed, and in that time Spock went without sleep and food. He spent his time between his station and the science labs, checking and rechecking all known data against his team's current findings, trying to assess if or when the storms might die down enough for the Enterprise to move closer.

Only when he nearly fell as he entered the Bridge did he concede to the Captain's pleas to go to his quarters and rest. Once there he spent his time feeding and stroking Max. Within an hour he was back in the labs trying yet another test when suddenly Kirk's calm and unhurried voice came through on the shipwide intercom.

"Mr Spock report to the Bridge immediately."

Spock's first thought was that somehow the Captain had discovered how little time he had spent resting, and was about to order a further rest period. He hated confrontations with Jim Kirk, and with a feeling of dread made his way to the Bridge. On entering he was immediately aware of an air of excitement. He moved to stand by the Captain, whose eyes were fixed on the front viewing screen. Spock's dark eyes rose to stare also.

"What do you make of that, Spock?" Kirk asked in a whisper.

Spock stood with his hands clasped behind his back. "I find it amazing, Captain."

The red planet was reasonably calm. It was as if there had never been anything wrong. Only small swirls of isolated dust storms remained.

"May I ask when did the phenomenon cease?"

"Just now. No-one noticed exactly when. It was so quick even the scanners failed to register it at once." Kirk stood staring ahead, hazel eyes fixed on the viewscreen. "I've never seen anything like it. It just seemed to fade out suddenly." Frown lines creased his forehead.

Spock too looked taken aback by what he saw. "I believe it is indeed a bizarre occurrence, for I have never known such storms to terminate so suddenly." His voice remained bland but Kirk knew the Vulcan was curious and eager to find the reason.

Spock turned to his computer, and after several minutes reported back to his Captain. "Sir, the electrical disturbances seem to have ceased entirely. There is evidence that the dust storms are diminishing. I estimate that they will have become non-existent in approximately twenty-six point four hours ship's time."

"Good." Kirk was relieved. "When will it be considered safe to send down landing parties?"

Spock raised an eyebrow. "Jim, I think it would be unwise at the present time. However I should like to request immediate shore-leave."

"Shore-leave?" Kirk found he had raised his voice so loud that heads turned. "Shore-leave? In these conditions? You said yourself it's not safe to send landing parties down yet. Why? Can't you wait a while until it's safe?"

"It is regulations that shore-leave on one's home planet is obligatory."

"At the discretion of the Captain," Kirk pointed out.

"I wish to ... visit my mother," Spock said softly. "Sir, I can override your objections; regulations..."

"Yes. I guess I know the regulations concerning shore-leave as well as you, Mr Spock but I really don't think they were written to cover a situation like this."

"Nevertheless, Captain, I would like your permission, under regulation 55a176, to visit my home." His eyes held Kirk's in an hypnotic gaze.

"So." Kirk looked back into his friend's face trying to read something from the blank expression. "Talk to me, Spock. Tell me. Why go alone, now?" he pleaded with a seldom-heard gentleness. "I'll send landing parties soon. Wait and go with them."

"With the conditions being as they are, Captain, I think that at this time my Mother would be unable to offer a complete landing party the proper hospitality that she would wish to."

Kirk was grinning as their old amiable rapport surfaced, an indication of their relief that

the waiting was nearly over. "I suppose the dust would untidy the place and be a nuisance." He gently touched a thin arm, his voice becoming serious once more.

"We have always been honest with each other, Spock."

Spock swallowed, "Jim, the dust storms are diminishing but they are still centering on Shikahr... Please, Jim."

"Okay, Mr Spock. You have my permission to beam down ... on one condition." He let go of Spock's arm, his voice deadly serious.

Spock looked for some indication of what was coming. "Sir?"

"You must take all reasonable care to ensure your safety. I shall require your promise as a Starfleet Officer that you will beam back at once if conditions are such as to put your life in danger. You do understand, Mr Spock? I'm making it an order."

"Perfectly, Captain."

"All right. Report to the transporter room in twenty-four hours... No. Make that twenty-six hours."

Spock started to protest the delay but the look on his Captain's face brooked no dissent.

"Spock, be careful. Vulcan Science Officers are hard to come by."

"I thank you for your concern, Captain. I will take all necessary precautions."

Kirk gave Spock a long searching look. "Spock, you will not leave this ship until you have slept and had a meal. I suppose to ensure that you do I'll have to make that an order too."

When Kirk had finished Spock nodded his head slightly. "I will comply with all your wishes, Captain... that I promise."

"I can ask no more, then. Good luck, my friend." Then almost as an afterthought, "Spock, get Bones to insert a transponder just in case things flare up again."

"Very well, sir." He turned and slowly left the Bridge. He was followed a few moments later by the Captain, who made his way to Sickbay, where he sought out McCoy.

"I need to talk, Bones, and to have one of your good stiff brandies."

McCoy didn't question him, just went to his locker and came back with a couple of glasses filled to the brim with a deep purple liquid. "Sorry, Jim. I've only got a bottle of stuff I picked up on Ekos... What's up?"

"Everything... Spock."

"Oh! Him again," McCoy said as if it explained everything. "What's up, now?"

Kirk looked really worried as he turned to face McCoy. "He's going down alone."

"Well, of course he is... He would; always been stubborn. It's his home, after all, Jim. If you can call that dry sand heap a home. His mother's down there. Wouldn't you do the

same?"

"Yes, I guess so," Kirk muttered thoughtfully.

Bones looked tired. He sighed, "Look, Jim. For years we've waited for Spock to show his Human side... show he cared. Now, at last he is actually doing just what a full Human would do in his shoes. After all, the logical thing to do is to get as far from that dust bomb as soon as possible."

"But it doesn't stop me worrying. I'll need him when the search parties go down. There are so many lives on the line down there."

"Yes, but we don't know them. It's easier if you're not emotionally involved." Bones pulled a face; as a doctor he knew that was true. "He has a way of getting to me too. Just like a bout of flu." He smiled. "Look, joking apart, Spock's senses are superior to ours, plus it is his home planet. With all that muck in the air he'll make far better time without us dragging behind. And to be honest, Jim, the less time we Humans spend down there breathing in that stuff the better."

Kirk took a large drink. Bones continued, "Once Spock knows what has happened to his mother he'll be able to operate much better; be of more use when the real rescue begins."

Kirk looked upset. "What really worries me, Bones, is if he finds something terrible down there and he's alone."

"You mean if he finds Amanda dead?" asked McCoy gently.

"Yes. After all, there's been no word from her since all this started."

McCoy frowned. "It would be a tragedy if anything happened to her - she's done so much for the Vulcan/Federation alliance. But Spock is Vulcan to all intents and purposes. He'll do his duty, Jim. He won't crack up, not while his people need help; after all, there is more than one family to consider here. If Amanda is dead then get Spock involved in as much work as you can. You know he'll want to grieve later, when he is alone; meanwhile keep him too busy to think."

"You're talking as if Amanda's death is a foregone conclusion."

"You saw that planet before the storms died down."

CHAPTER TEN

Twenty-six hours later Kirk stood with Spock in the transporter room. Visibility on the surface of the planet had improved, but not as much as Kirk had hoped. He would have to delay landing parties to the area around Shikahr and concentrate rescue elsewhere, effectively leaving Spock without any back-up for longer than he had planned.

They stood together as they had so many times before. There was no need for words but Spock turned and said quietly,

"Captain, there is a favour I would ask of you."

"Yes, Spock. What is it?"

"I request you ensure that Max is cared for should I fail to return." There was no inflection in the voice but the dark eyes seemed veiled in a way Kirk seldom saw.

"Of course I will, Spock."

"Nurse Chapel has kindly agreed to tend to her day to day needs. I am only concerned for the cat's long-term future. Perhaps..."

"Don't worry. You'll be back, but if it will put your mind at rest I'll keep her with me."

Spock raised an eyebrow in the old familiar way. "But I thought you did not care for cats, Captain."

"Yes, that's true, but Max isn't just any old cat, is she? She belongs to you."

"Indeed."

Spock stepped onto the transporter pad. Kirk handed him a filter mask. His voice held a slight tremor as he said, "Ready, Mr Spock?"

"Ready, Captain."

"Very well. Energise, Mr Kyle."

There was a slight hum. Spock's figure seemed to sparkle and shimmer for a brief moment before vanishing into atoms, to be almost instantly reformed on the surface of Vulcan only yards from his parents' house.

Red dust swirled around, finding its way into the air filter and leaving a gritty taste in his mouth, stinging his eyes, peppering his skin. Spock set his mind on one thing.... finding his mother.

On his slow tortuous way through the drifts of sand he saw a glimpse of blue. Instinctively, he knew what lay under the slight mound of red dust. He began to dig, slowly at first then faster until his hard work revealed a body. It lay face down, dressed in the rich blue robe that denoted a high clan member.

He knelt and carefully, breath held, slowly turned the body over. Spock released his breath in a gasp of relief... it was not his mother. He recognised the woman as being a member of his clan, one who had befriended his mother on her arrival on Vulcan as Sarek's bride.

As he carefully laid the body back down, Spock felt a strange feeling of relief edged with sadness. Would he ever be free of these Human emotions? How much easier his task would be without them. Why did they rise unbidden whenever his defences were low? They were a burden he must probably carry for the rest of his days.

Spock looked around him. There seemed to be several raised heaps of red Vulcan dust similar to this one. Did they all contain bodies? Would this be the beginning of the end for this world he called home, which in fact had never really been a home to him?

Spock crouched there, replacing the covering of sand over the body of the woman who had been his mother's best friend, taking the time to blank his mind to the thoughts of despair

that kept creeping through his barriers.

He stood, his task completed, and slowly carefully made his way towards the low white stone house which as he drew nearer he saw was buried almost halfway up in red sand. It stood silent and still.

Spock stumbled and fell heavily over yet another mound before reaching his home. He felt sadness as he walked where he knew his mother's roses lay now buried deep under the sea of red, choked to death - just as so many Vulcans had been. Sadness seemed to envelop him and he was glad he was alone so no-one could see the tears that filled his eyes. Tears for his chosen people; for memories of childhood, the good and the bad. All buried, all so deathly quiet under the red drifts.

He had felt fear, sadness, joy; had even felt, once or twice, the strange emotion called love. His Human side was always there, just below the Vulcan surface that he so carefully maintained. But now, alone, so alone, he found it hard to push away the feelings that swamped him. Perhaps it was because his Human mother was so much in his thoughts, so close to his heart. He wished Jim was with him, giving him the strength to continue. He stopped and stood still, calling on all his Vulcan teachings, re-enforcing the barriers until he felt ready to resume his search.

His Human half still plagued him. He remembered his mother had once told him things are never truly valued until they are lost forever. Did that also apply to people? Why did that thought keep spinning around in his head?

If he had obeyed his father, as a good Vulcan son should have done, had never left to join Starfleet Academy, he would have been here to help his mother and her friends... IT WAS ALL HIS FAULT! How could he ever face his father and clan again? Illogical ... but was it?

Just as the first tentative seeds of a reconciliation had been sown during the trip to Babel... Now he had destroyed his family through his selfishness, his ambition.... Illogical ... but was it? How could he ever live with these thoughts? It had been easy to escape Vulcan and join Starfleet... all it had cost was his father's love... It would not be so easy to escape the thoughts that filled his mind now. What would it cost to rid himself of them? He once again blanked his mind.

He made his way, at times knee deep, to where the door should have been. Spock was met by a large mountain of drifted sand. He began to dig, at first methodically, but as fear crept back he tore at the sand like a man possessed. One man would not be enough. He should have listened to Jim and waited for a full landing party. Still he kept clawing away. It took hours which seemed like days before, nails broken, slender fingers bleeding, he had uncovered enough of the door to enable him to tug it open.

He collapsed in a heap in the hall. His mother had been rebuked many times by his grandmother for the Human pride Amanda had felt in the gleam of the highly polished tiles. Now they were hidden under the red flood that had found its way into the house.

Spock scrambled to his feet, straining his ears to catch any sound that might indicate life, but nothing reached his acute hearing. Silence. Such a change from the hustle and bustle of the normally busy diplomatic residence that he remembered as a child.

"Mother!" he shouted at the top of his voice. Then again more urgently. Only the silence remained. He removed the air filter and called again. His voice was strained. Still the same response. Spock felt his energy reserves depleting. He rubbed tired, sore eyes with the

back of his hand, blinking in the dim, dusty light. He looked around him; the fine red carpet of sand was undisturbed. No-one had entered or left since the storms had begun.

"Mother!" he called again, fear beginning to rise in his throat. He toured the house, room by room, but each was as empty as the last. Spock finally sank to his knees. He was tired; the poor air was making breathing hard. He knelt there for some time, perhaps for twenty minutes, until the urgent call of his communicator roused him into action again.

"Spock here."

Kirk's voice answered, interrupted by static. "Spock!" he said with intense relief. "How is it down there?"

"The storms have almost entirely abated, Captain, leaving large residues of sand in drifts... no sign of life at this time."

There was a long pause before Kirk's voice came again. "Report hourly. Be prepared to be transported back at eighteen hundred hours ship's time. Other landing parties are working their way in your direction. Report in if they make contact before beam-up. Kirk out."

Spock carefully replaced his communicator back on his belt. As he did so he suddenly remembered the small, safe room. With all his senseless wallowing in Human self-pity he had forgotten his father's repository below the study.

As he entered his father's room, used by Sarek as a study when he was home, which Spock recalled as being seldom, Spock felt overwhelming fear. Fear such as he had felt the last time he had stood there... That day had proved to be the turning point in his life, the day he had announced his intention of leaving Vulcan to travel to Sol and enlist as a Starfleet cadet.

Spock looked down at his hands. They trembled now just as they had done then... eighteen years ago! Was it really that long? It was as if it was yesterday. The room hadn't changed; it was just as he remembered it. The heavy wooden desk, shipped all the way from Earth and now covered in red granules. The rich wall paintings faded. The space where his portrait had once hung until his father, no doubt, had ordered its removal, as a gesture of the final rift with his disowned son.

Spock stared around, crossing back over the years, unsure where the room's entrance lay. Then he remembered. The desk was old, deeply engraved. Spock's long, bloody but nimble fingers searched and at last found the hidden catch. He pressed it and waited.

Slowly, so slowly, the panelled wall at his left slid open to reveal a dimly lit passageway. He stooped and made his way into the darkness. The air was stale. He sucked in air in gasps. At last he was able to stand upright. The floor sloped downwards and he slowly made his way deeper into the tunnel, relieved when it opened into a larger area.

There in front of him, silhouetted against the lamp light, stood his mother. She didn't speak... just held her arms out to him.

Spock hesitated, as if not believing she was real, then took her in his arms. She buried her face in his shoulder. They hugged each other tightly for a long time before she said,

"I knew someone would come and find us. I never thought it would be you. Oh Spock, I can't believe it. I can't believe after all this time it's you."

"Mother," was all Spock could say.

A sound behind him made him turn to see another figure standing in the shadows. Amanda broke away from his arms and said,

"Spock, this is my pupil T'Solya. T'Solya, this is my son Spock. I have spoken of him."

Spock nodded and gave the Vulcan greeting. "We have met."

T'Solya lowered her head in respect. "I remember. We were children."

"I was the child. You were my protector from others older and stronger."

"It was an honour, Spock, son of Sarek," T'Solya said. Amanda noted how the two looked into each other's eyes.

Spock, aware of the lengthening silence, looked around the room. He asked, "How are you both? Is there anyone else near who can be helped?"

Amanda shook her head. "The Elders came and told the people to leave for the mountains, but I feared it would take too long and that we would be safer here, where your father could find us. Oh, Spock! It was awful! I thought we would die." She gripped his hand and because in her distress her barriers were weak Spock felt her fear as clearly as if were his own.

T'Solya watched the touching between mother and son with a blank look. Her grey eyes never left Spock. So, this was the small boy she remembered as the victim of his fellow student's taunts; Sarek's son, the half-Human. She recalled the whispered gossip when he had left home. As he stood before her now he looked a full-blooded Vulcan. The only indication he was otherwise was the way he allowed his mother to grip his hand, and the love in his eyes as he looked down at her. T'Solya found to her shame she was wondering how it would be to have a man look at her like that.

Spock knew time was nearing to beam-up so he could help in the rescue plans. He said firmly,

"You will come with me to the Enterprise, at least for the time being. I will endeavour to contact Father. I believe he is already on his way home."

"But what can be done to help the others who may be trapped out there?"

"Do not concern yourself, Mother. There are Starships waiting in high orbit by now. The people will be helped soon. My Captain will have sent rescue parties down as soon as possible. Other areas are not so badly affected as Shikahr."

"Oh my son, I cannot believe this is happening. It's like a bad dream."

"Mother, please. All will be well, but I am of little use to my Captain or anyone else just standing here. I must get you both to the ship and return to my duties." He turned to T'Solya. "Do you have family near?"

"Yes. My House is that of Sevonic."

"Then we will endeavour to get there and reunite you with your family." Spock took his

mother's hand. "You will both clasp hands and follow me."

T'Solya looked hesitant.

"What is the matter?" Amanda asked.

"It is not fitting that we should have contact."

Spock turned his dark eyes to meet her grey ones and said quietly, "Unless you do it is quite possible you will be lost if the storms return. Surely the preservation of every surviving Vulcan is most desirable at this time. What good will the teachings of Surak be if there is no one left to practice them?"

"That is logical," she answered, and carefully held Amanda's outstretched hand.

Spock led the women back along the tunnel. On the way he collected several of the stored food packs from the recesses in the walls.

"Mother, T'Solya, carry these. It is well to be prepared for all eventualities."

Taking T'Solya by the hand Spock led the way out of the tunnel, through the silent house and out into the gardens. The wind had dropped and all seemed peaceful, but their progress was painfully slow. He had to assist the women on more than one occasion but at last they arrived at the home of the Sevonic clan. Spock told the women to wait for him at the entrance, and went inside.

There were several bodies on the open-sided veranda. Spock didn't know the family well, but there was an elderly couple and a young boy aged about twelve years lying there. He continued to search the house and grounds but found no signs of any other occupants, so he returned to the waiting women.

"I have discovered three people dead." He proceeded to describe the ages and clothes, and before he could finish T'Solya nodded calmly.

"They are my parents and brother Sovkon."

"I grieve with thee," Spock said with feeling.

T'Solya looked into his face. Yes, he did indeed grieve for her loss. Now she knew what had been so different about the child, Spock. He had shown emotions as a child but they had been ones of love, hurt, frustration, never hate or anger. If he was indeed carrying Human blood it wasn't evil as she had been led to believe. This man was kind and caring.

Amanda whispered, "I too share your grief, T'Solya." Then she turned to Spock and said, "I think we should leave this place, Spock."

"I agree, Mother."

He led the way to an open space and taking his communicator contacted the Enterprise. "Spock here. Three to beam up immediately."

Kyle's voice answered. "Yes, Mr Spock. Three. Beaming now."

Amanda reached and held T'Solya's hand as the sparkle took them.

Captain James Kirk ran to the transporter room and arrived just as Spock and the women appeared on the transporter pads.

"Spock, Lady Amanda, welcome." He looked at T'Solya with open curiosity.

Amanda smiled, "Thank you, Captain. This is T'Solya. She is a pupil of mine and a friend."

Kirk looked at the pale face of the young woman. She returned his stare but didn't show any emotion. *Typical Vulcan*, Kirk thought. *Why are they always so good-looking?*

Spock stepped down and turned to Kirk. "Captain, I will show T'Solya and my mother to their quarters, then I will give you a full report."

"Take your time, Spock. The USS Constellation has begun to send shuttles down to move survivors to the safer parts of the planet, and the Republic will achieve orbit in about two hours. McCoy has gone down with our first landing parties to organise the movement to Sickbay or temporary medical stations, so it's all in hand for the moment. As long as the weather holds things can get moving. You've done enough for now. Go and rest."

Spock nodded, "Very well, sir." He led his mother and T'Solya to the VIP staterooms.

Kirk continued to make arrangements to accommodate survivors. Ensigns Yates and Phillips were among the teams ordered to prepare all available vacant cabins. Yates was busy fitting spare bunks into a cabin on D deck when Spock, Lady Amanda and T'Solya stepped out of the turbo-lift opposite the open cabin door. Yates got a good look at the party as they passed by, particularly the beautiful T'Solya. He waited until they had entered a stateroom further along the corridor, then he went to find Phillips.

"Hey, Phillips. Guess who I've seen."

Phillips was not in the mood to play guessing games. He had been on duty for hours and emergency stand-by before that.

"God?" he answered sarcastically.

"No, nearly right. He certainly thinks he's the next best thing - that Vulcan! And guess what he's brought with him? His whole damn family! Before we know it the whole ship will be overrun with 'em."

Phillips threw some bed covers down. "Look, Yates, why don't you forget about Mr Spock? And give me a hand."

"Forget Spock! You must be joking. After what he did to my brother!"

Phillips sneered, "What did he do to your brother? Come off it! Roger asked for all he go, carrying on like that in front of the Captain. Take my advice and leave it. It's over."

Yates pulled Phillips by the tunic until their face were only inches apart.

"It ain't over till I say so. Until that... alien pays. Not just for Rog but for the rest of his kind and what they're doing; taking over."

"Well leave me out of it. Mr Spock saved me. If you try involving me in any more of

your mad schemes to get Mr Spock or anybody else I'll go to the Captain."

Yates was taken aback by the way Phillips had not been intimidated. Phillips pulled away. "Let me go... Now!"

Yates pushed Phillips away in disgust. "I don't need you!" He stormed out of the cabin, leaving a worried Phillips behind.

Amanda was tired, but eager to try and contact her husband, so as soon as she, T'Solya and Spock had eaten, Spock asked Uhura to request an open channel to the ship carrying Sarek back to Vulcan. Within moments Sarek's face appeared on the personal communications visual display unit.

"My wife," he said, a tinge of relief in his voice.

"My husband. I am safe here with our son and T'Solya, daughter of the clan of Sevonic. She was trapped with me when the storms hit our home. But for our son we would still be trapped there... Would you like to speak with Spock?"

Sarek seemed to dismiss that and continued, "How are things on Vulcan?"

"Not good, my husband. Many lives have been lost, some needlessly, I fear. We tried to contact you many times at the storm's onset but the radio was affected by the electrical disturbances. However there were reports of the terrible effects from sheltered parts of the planet... I am so afraid that the toll will be high." She looked across to Spock, who nodded his head in confirmation. She continued, "I am afraid for our relatives and friends, Sarek."

"We can have little influence on what will be, Amanda, but fear not - Vulcan has many friends in the Federation who are sending ships to aid us in our time of need. I will have much to do in the coming weeks, but I will be with you as soon as I can."

"Would you like to speak to our son?" Amanda asked again, hopefully, although she already knew what the answer would be.

"You know well how busy we both are at this time. Why do you persist?"

"Because Spock is our son. I wish for us to be a family again."

"That is impossible, my wife. We can never recapture the past." There was a long pause then Sarek said, "I must go and make arrangements for temporary housing for our people. I bid you farewell until we are together, my wife. Bid farewell to T'Solya. Live long and prosper." The screen went blank.

Amanda turned to face Spock, who stood silently to one side. His face betrayed nothing, but Amanda knew how hurt her son must be at his father's attitude. Spock didn't speak but just looked away for several moments as if gathering himself together. Then he turned to face her, controlled and Vulcan again.

"Are you all right, Spock?" she asked with motherly concern.

"Of course. Will you require anything else? I am due to report to the Captain shortly."



Amanda moved closer to her son, aware of T'Solya watching them. Dropping her voice to a low whisper inaudible to T'Solya she asked, "My son, are you all right here - with these people?"

"I am content."

"Are you happy?"

He looked at her with wide eyes. "I am not sure what you wish me to say. I have friendship. I have access to the work I love." At once he recognized the slip of his tongue. So had Amanda!

"Love, Spock? Oh, you are so like your father. The only time I've heard him use that word was in context with work, too. Never about people." There was sadness in her voice.

"Mother... I must go now."

"Yes. Of course. Do not let me keep you from your duties."

As he reached the door he turned to face her. "I am on duty for eight hours, then I shall return and we can talk."

Amanda raised her fingers in the Vulcan salute. "Very well, Spock. Go in peace."

He returned the salute and made his way to the turbolift. Just as he was about to step inside he became aware of someone behind him. He turned to lock eyes with T'Solya. She immediately looked down and avoided his gaze.

"I wish to express my recognition for saving us, Spock. Also, may I say how much I owe to your family. Your mother has offered me a home when we are able to return to Vulcan. As elder son, I ask your leave to do so. You will be master when your father is dead. I hope that may not be for a considerable time, but I do not wish to do anything that is not with your approval."

Spock smiled with his eyes but she, not knowing him as well as Jim Kirk did, failed to recognise it. To her the front of equanimity remained.

"I am sure you owe me nothing. All I did was my duty as a Starfleet Officer. As for my family... I have no influence on my father's or mother's actions although it does indeed seem excellent that you have found a home with them. Do not concern yourself, for it is highly unlikely that I shall ever return to Vulcan even after my father's death. You can rest assured you will have a home there for as long as you need it."

"I thank you, Spock. I would be... grieved..." (she had searched for a word to try to sum up how she felt without resorting to an emotion and found it very difficult) "...if you never returned home again."

"I have found it is easier to function if I dispense with the need for a 'home'. For me it is merely a word." His voice was cold.

She watched as he nodded his farewell, his hair reflecting blue in the overhead lights, and continued to watch him until his slim figure disappeared behind the closing lift doors. He was indeed a handsome man, a strange mixture of both Vulcan and Terran. She returned, deep in thought, to the stateroom she was to share with the Lady Amanda.

Amanda stood as T'Solya re-entered the room. "T'Solya, I was becoming concerned that you might have lost your way in this maze of a ship. To me all the decks look alike, although Spock would think not."

"I was just speaking with your son. He is an interesting man."

Amanda noted the slight colour in T'Solya's cheeks. "Yes, indeed. Spock does tend to interest many, but you were a good friend to him in your childhood, and he did not have many friends then."

"I remember. Our fellow students treated him badly."

"No worse than the children on Earth. Poor Spock..." Amanda, thinking she might embarrass her son by discussing him with T'Solya, stopped what she was planning to say.

T'Solya continued, "He, as a Vulcan, must miss home but he has said he will never return."

Amanda pursed her lips tight.

"Has he never been home since he left to join the Academy?"

"Very, very seldom," Amanda said regretfully.

With the blank honesty of a Vulcan T'Solya said, "I would wish to know Spock better."

Amanda sat down and indicated for T'Solya to follow suit. "How much better?"

"I think we would be well matched. Now my family are no more I am free to negotiate a bonding. As you know my first bonding ended when Staur lost his life."

Amanda remembered the tragic death of the young man during the plague of fever that had swept Vulcan fifteen years before. It had left many girls without their mates.

"This is a difficult matter and should really only be discussed with Sarek."

T'Solya sighed. "I know, but I wish to talk to you first. I know you think this to be a sudden notion, but I have truly loved your son for many years. However, I always thought him lost to me, bonded as he is to T'Pring, and then more so when he was disowned. With the events of the last week, the death of my family, I have come to understand how fleeting things can be. There is so little time; things, people change, sometimes to be lost forever... I wish to have Spock... if he will have me..."

Amanda was surprised at the girl's honesty. "I am afraid there will be many obstacles before you obtain your dream."

"What are these obstacles?"

"Starfleet is my son's passion. It would prevent a regular contact between you. Secondly, Spock himself is already bonded, as you have said, to T'Pring, although that is not of his choosing and he has, so far, resisted all attempts to bring them together in marriage."

T'Solya interrupted. "T'Pring is at home, maybe even dead. I am here. Would you, as his mother, object to our friendship, should Spock respond?"

"Spock is his own man now. His Human half has made him more free-thinking than his Vulcan peers. He will go his own way. If he chooses to allow a close friendship to develop between you I could not oppose him. He has defied his own father, as you already know, and for that act Spock has paid dearly over the years... Perhaps he is due some happiness and conceivably you may provide it, but I must emphasise strongly that the Spock you remember as a child is not the Spock of today. I fear you will find he is not responsive to your aspirations."

"I hear your words. I shall endeavour to overcome these obstacles, but accept the chances of doing so are not good."

"I will not pretend that they are, T'Solya. I have never thought the arranged bonding with T'Pring was a good one. They were ill-matched even as children. My dearest wish is to see my son happy. If you can do that I will give you my blessing."

Amanda held out her hand to the girl and they touched for a brief moment in a sign of affection. It had taken Amanda a long time to get used to the strength of mind Vulcan women possessed. This young girl knew just what she wanted and was out to get it. T'Pring's cold, unemotional face came to mind. Amanda secretly prayed that T'Solya would succeed in her quest for Spock's love. Goodness knew what Sarek would think.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Jim Kirk sipped the black coffee appreciatively. The swish of the turbolift doors heralded the arrival of Spock on the Bridge. He came to stand at his Captain's side.

"All right, Spock?"

"Yes, Captain. How is the evacuation and rescue proceeding?"

"Very well. Things are much easier when dealing with a logical race like the Vulcans. We are almost full to capacity with survivors. When G deck has been filled we are ordered to stand off and allow the Oblik ship to drop to lower orbit and pick up the remaining survivors from this sector. Thank God that communications are back to full strength. It seems the other side of the planet wasn't so badly affected, and we'll be able to drop the people there as soon as there is sufficient shelter and medical facilities arranged."

Spock sounded relieved, though his expression didn't show it as he said quietly, "I shall continue to scan the surface and feed data into the main computers." He moved to his station.

By the time his watch was over Spock was desperate for sleep, but remembering his promise to his mother he made his way to her stateroom.

T'Solya greeted him on his arrival. "I am instructed to tell you that Lady Amanda has a headache and has retired to her bed. She has asked me to ensure you eat before returning to your quarters."

Spock tried to excuse himself but T'Solya insisted he enter and partake of the meal she had ordered from the food processor. Spock flopped into a deep soft chair and let her fuss as she served his food. His eyes followed her as she moved, with a swish of her silk robes, back and forth with various dishes of traditional food. She was pleasing to the eye and well

educated in the duties of a Vulcan woman of tending to a male's needs.

She removed the empty dishes and dispatched them down the garbage chute. Turning back she found Spock was asleep, his dark hair a contrast to the white chairback. Careful not to wake him she fetched a cushion and placed it under his head. Then she made her way to her own section.

About an hour later a call light flashed on the personal communication terminal. She moved across and switched the line open. A voice echoed around the room. It was tinny and harsh.

"Lady T'Solya, please report to Briefing Room Three. The Captain wishes to speak to you concerning a surviving member of your family."

She gasped, "Yes. At once." Her mind was racing as she wondered who the survivor could be. Perhaps it was her cousin T'Min. They were the same age and had spent so much time in each other's company. It would be so nice to see her again...

She crept back into the section where she had left Spock. He was deeply asleep, his chest rising and sinking in slow, relaxed rhythm, his long eyelashes resting on sallow cheeks. She moved quietly to the sleeping section, and pressing the door release peeped in to see Amanda also asleep.

Leaving silently she walked down the winding corridor until she saw an ensign walking towards her, and asked for directions to Briefing Room Three. He pointed to the turbolift and she made her way towards it. Pressing the request button she waited excitedly for the turbo's arrival.

As soon as the door to Briefing Room Three opened she rushed in and immediately knew something was wrong. The room was in darkness. Thinking she must have entered the wrong room she turned to leave, only to become aware there was someone standing in the shadows blocking her way. A cold, hard hand clamped on her wrist and another across her mouth stifled the scream before it reached her lips.

Through the clouds of sleep Spock became aware of an insistent buzzing. He took only seconds to come fully awake and hastily making his way to the communicator, silenced the alert, flicked the button and said, "Spock here."

"Mr Spock, it's Ensign Yates... Get down to Briefing Room Three... now!" His voice brooked no refusal.

Spock remained calm. "Ensign Yates, that is not the correct procedure when asking a senior officer to report to a station."

"I'M NOT ASKING! I'M TELLING! You green-skinned bastard...! GET DOWN HERE NOW! And don't bring anyone with you or you'll regret it."

"I shall regret nothing, Mr Yates. You will report at once..."

"NO!" Yates screamed. "Get it through your brain, Spock. I want you now! And I've got something here you'll want. If you aren't here in five minutes I'll take it that you ain't comin' and I'll feed this mangy cat to the disposal hatch! So, get here fast." The line went dead.

Spock moved to the sleeping section and glanced with relief at the still sleeping form in the bed. His mother was safe. He chewed at his bottom lip, uncertain which course to take; deal with Yates alone or involve the Captain and Security Section. It was his problem, he decided, therefore he would deal with it himself.

He made his way to Briefing Room Three, ignoring the passing ensigns' acknowledgements. Spock waited a brief moment before opening the door and cautiously entering.

Yates stood by the disposal chute, and illuminated by the light from the corridor Spock could see Max. The cat was a struggling, writhing form held by her scruff with a phaser aimed at her head. Yates calmly turned the weapon until it was level with Spock's stomach.

"Well, well. Here he is at last. Mr Computer. Mr Memory Bank. Mr Goodie-Goodie." Venom dripped from the words. Yates' eyes were round and staring. Spock could see the madness reflected there. He stood perfectly still and remained silent. Yates jerked the cat up and down, nearer and nearer to the flip-top hatch of the disposal unit.

"Well, Mr Ice. Here we are. You, me and the cat." Suddenly his voice rose to a near scream. "What kinda man are you? You prefer to keep this mangy thing on board instead of my brother..."

Now Spock understood something of the compulsion that drove this Human. "Your brother, Mr Yates, had chosen to ignore Starfleet Regulations and so suffered the consequences ... a self inflicted wound."

Spock, for all his logic and his eighteen years in Starfleet, still did not fully understand the Human mind and most certainly not the workings of a demented one.

Yates' hatred and anger exploded. He dropped the struggling cat and fired. Spock threw himself to one side to avoid the phaser blast. For all his agility he fell in a semi-conscious state, unable to move, nausea welling in his stomach. Yates moved closer and aimed a kick at the First Officer, catching him under the arm. For a Human the blow would have been extremely painful but it hit the region of the Vulcan's heart. Combined with the effects of the phaser it was enough to send him into unconsciousness. Yates' temper had robbed him of the one thing he craved the most... to see the Vulcan begging for his life.

Yates put the phaser on his belt then dragged the Vulcan to a corner where he propped the First Officer against the wall. He then moved to the large centre table and stooping down pulled the struggling figure of T'Solya from under it. She was tied by the wrists and had a gag around her mouth. A slight noise made him spin round.

Max was sitting across Spock's legs, rubbing her face against the black service trousers. Yates grabbed the cat and searching around found a large empty computer disc carrier. He thrust the cat in and slammed the lid down, trapping the animal inside.

Spock began to regain consciousness. As he painfully opened his dark eyes Yates screamed at him,

"Here, Vulcan. Look who else I've got." He pulled T'Solya up by her long black hair. She tried to stifle a sob of pain.

"LEAVE HER." Spock's voice was deep, commanding.

Yates smiled, "So. At last I've broken through that damn Vulcan wall, have I? Well, Mr Spock, I want you to really suffer before I kill you, and be sure I will."

Spock remained silent.

"But first I'll make you watch this bitch die and that vermin too."

Spock's glance moved across the room and rested on the intercom unit inches from where Yates held T'Solya pinned down across the table top. Spock began to project his instructions to her - his thoughts to hers - holding her in an hypnotic gaze.

They were not bondmates, were not t'hy'la as he and Jim were, but Vulcan blood ran in their veins. They shared the same culture. He knew there was only a faint chance that she would be able to pick up on his instructions, but it seemed their only hope. Perspiration stood out on his forehead as he concentrated his whole being on T'Solya.

She gazed ahead dully. Although she gave no indication she was nevertheless edging towards the on/off switch. Yates was smiling with a macabre pleasure at what he thought was a Vulcan paralysed with fear. The Ensign threatened Spock with all sorts of methods of death and failed to notice T'Solya flick the intercom on with her elbow.

Spock spoke in a calm unhurried voice. "Mr Yates, you will gain little by holding us here. A briefing room is hardly secure from a determined attack by a Security team."

"Shut up! Shut up! I didn't ask to hear from you. I talk ... you obey. Now I want you to choose which dies first, the cat or the girl?" Yates pulled the phaser from his belt and Spock blinked as he saw the madman turn the setting from stun to kill. All the time Yates was demanding that Spock choose which was to die first, the cat or the girl. His voice was a devilish inquisition.

Spock knew he intended to kill them all in the end and with true Vulcan honesty said so.

"Yes, you're right! Always SO right, aren't you? The Captain's right-hand man." Yates laughed hysterically.

"YOU'RE WRONG, YATES. My First Officer is not my right hand, although I sometimes wish he was."

Yates spun round to face the figure framed in the doorway. Captain James Kirk stood there, phaser drawn, and behind him a contingent of Security Officers.

"Send them away or I'll kill 'em all!" Yates yelled, pulling T'Solya to him.

Kirk hesitated. "Don't be a fool, Yates. It isn't worth it. You'll never get away. Where can you go? Let the girl alone."

Yates sneered, "Might have known you'd be here sooner or later, Kirk. Just in time to see your precious First Officer die."

Spock tried to rise to his feet but fell back. The phaser stun was still affecting his limbs. Yates aimed the phaser at the cargo box. Max's cries could clearly be heard from inside.

"A Mexican stand-off, Kirk. Only you don't hold the winning cards, do you? The cat first, I think." His finger tightened on the trigger.

T'Solya looked across to Spock. It was a traumatic sight as he tried to control his emotions, but to no avail. She looked to where Yates was aiming the phaser at the box containing Max. She must stop this.

With all her considerable Vulcan strength she pulled away from Yates' grip and threw herself in the direction of the box. Yates fired as an automatic reaction to her sudden movement. There was a blinding flash as the blast hit and T'Solya and the box dissolved into nothing.

Spock pulled himself to his feet and by some hidden strength began to rain double-handed blows onto Yates, knocking him to the ground, the power of the Vulcan body-weight giving the ensign no chance to resist.

"Spock! Leave him. Spock! STOP IT!"

Spock, driven by his feelings of grief and revenge, didn't listen. Several Security men moved forward, worried that the outraged Vulcan might harm the Captain unintentionally, but Kirk motioned them out of the way.

Kirk saw the look of complete anguish and desolation in Spock's eyes. The Captain moved quickly to drag Spock off the bloody and battered ensign. Spock shrugged him off as if he were a child. He pulled again at Spock's arms.

"Spock, stop it. It's over. Spock. STOP IT FOR ME."

The First Officer sank to his knees. At Kirk's signal two Security men stepped forward and dragged Yates out of the room. Kirk helped Spock to his feet and said gently,

"It's all over now. Come on down to Sickbay and let Bones take a look at those hands."

Spock looked down numbly at his hands, which were covered in green and red blood. He hastily wiped them on his tunic top, a gesture of trying to erase the evidence of his lack of control. Kirk gently led his friend past the darkly stained floor where only moments before T'Solya had stood.

"Why did he do it? Why?" Spock muttered over and over again. Kirk wrapped a protective arm around him, but Spock shrugged it off.

"I am all right, Captain. I am fully functional... I... I just need to go to my quarters for a moment... to be alone."

Kirk nodded and watched in silence as the tall Vulcan made his way to the private sanctuary of his quarters, where, Kirk knew, he would stay until all traces of pain and emotion were eradicated. Then, Spock would emerge as the elegant, controlled First Officer of the Enterprise once again.



TO QUESTION THE STARS

Starlight, starbright,
What is happening in space tonight?
Is it as peaceful as it looks,
Or, like Earth, torn by wars?

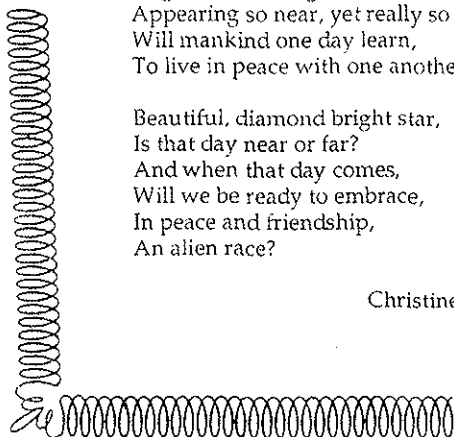
Oh, stars in the night sky,
Can you tell me why,
Men seem determined to destroy,
Both themselves and the Earth?

Oh, stars above,
Can you not teach them,
The lesson of brotherly love?

Bright and shining star,
Appearing so near, yet really so far,
Will mankind one day learn,
To live in peace with one another?

Beautiful, diamond bright star,
Is that day near or far?
And when that day comes,
Will we be ready to embrace,
In peace and friendship,
An alien race?

Christine J Jones



DAWNWIND

Dawnwind raced
Through the sand;
Eddies chased
Through the shrubs;
A Vulcan faced
The desert sunrise.

Shadow changed to light
Over mountains;
Gone was the night
Over the plains;
The dunes glistened bright
In the new morning.

The alien animals cry
Their welcome to the day
Singing to the orange sky
Their joy of life;
Daytime is nigh
And the desert awakens.

The Vulcan turned to the sun;
His face bathed in gold;
The day just begun
Its mysteries to unfold;
At its end he should have won
The Symbol of Kolinahr.

But a voice from a different source
Turned his head away;
He felt a powerful force
Calling him that day.
He chose another course;
His answer lay elsewhere.

Above him now the desert stars
Shine coldly in his eyes;
His destiny calls from afar
From aliens to his race;
His dream of Kolinahr
Is sand beneath his feet.

Linda C Wood



JUST WHAT THE DOCTOR ORDERED

by

David Gallagher

Dr McCoy was in a foul mood, mostly because of a very nasty transporter accident he'd been involved in the previous evening. He had been beaming into a crowded assembly hall as part of a diplomatic mission on a Federation outpost, only to discover that his dress uniform had materialised two metres away.

His embarrassment was worsened by the fact that he had overheard one of the mostly female audience exclaim, "Well, I don't know what he's wearing, but it certainly needs ironing!"

"Damn blasted machines!" McCoy fumed to himself as he stomped around Sickbay. "Scattering a man's atoms halfway across the galaxy!" And then, remembering the embarrassing laughter at his predicament as he had tried to cover his nakedness, he muttered, "And what did they expect - I'm a Doctor, not a... a Chippendale!"

His angry monologue was interrupted by the swish of the Sickbay doors, and he looked up as Chief Engineer Montgomery Scott - looking slightly the worse for wear - made an entrance. This surprised McCoy, as it usually took a team of wild horses to drag any of the command crew into Sickbay.

"Scotty," he greeted the Engineer. "I haven't seen you in a while."

"Aye, Doctor," replied Scott. "That's because I've been ill."

Suddenly a wicked gleam appeared in the Doctor's blue eyes as he saw an ideal chance to get even with the Chief Engineer, whom he held personally responsible for the transporter incident.

"Well, Scotty, you've come to the right place. Put this gown on and I'll give you a complete physical."

"Och away with you, Doctor - it's just something I ate. Can't you just give me a couple of pills and let me get back to ma bairns?"

"Oh no, Scotty, you're not getting out of it that easily. Now get out of that uniform and put the gown on, Mister."

And so it was that Dr McCoy began the most thorough and rigorous physical examination he had ever undertaken - with a few extras thrown in for good measure. He started by asking Scotty to raise his right leg, which he did; then he told him to raise his left leg, which he also did - and promptly fell on his behind.

McCoy grinned evilly and asked innocently, "And how long have you been having these dizzy spells, Scotty?"

And so it went on.

Eventually Scotty's ordeal was over, after much prodding and poking, tests and samples. He was just pulling on his boots when the good Doctor returned from his office and announced cheerily, "Well, Scotty, I can't find anything wrong with you - but I'd say it was because of the drink."

Scotty stood, slowly, realising he 'd been had; and not wanting to let McCoy have the last word, said sweetly as he left,

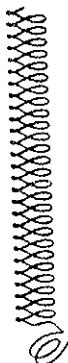
"Och, that's okay, Doctor - I'll just come back when you're sober."



WHAT MUST BE DONE

These arms that have held you
And felt your warmth
Would choose to keep you safe
If only they could.
A choice that cannot, must not, be taken.
I have held life's blossom within my hands
And its burden lies heavy.
The lingering scent of your perfume,
Your curving body softness.
Flickering images haunt my thoughts.
Extraordinary woman above the common mould!
A thousand times I'll live your death,
See you take those steps,
For the thousandth time hear the screech of brakes,
The cries from those around.
Love's memory survives intact,
An uncrushed spirit, vital and real,
But now blown cold.
Amidst the ruins
The wind howls, mourning the aeons,
The passing of time.
"You did what had to be done
... As I knew you would."
He is always there,
Always has been and always will be,
By my side.
Life's brutal truth:
No mortal hand
Can change today yet keep tomorrow.

Gillian Catchpole.



WHAT A NERVE!

by

Gloria Fry

Jim Kirk groaned as stinging waves sped along his nerves, causing involuntary shudders throughout his body. Once more he had succumbed. Once more he was gradually regaining control of himself.

"Oh no... not again!" he exclaimed wearily, as he felt the tight Vulcan grip around his bare shoulders. "I can't take this any more, Spock. You keep knocking me out!"

"But you wanted me to do it to you, Jim!" Spock protested. "You insisted on it, you said that you wished to learn the technique."

"Oh..." Kirk murmured. "I've got such a pain in my..." A soft moan escaped him as the ache spread further "... neck," he finished.

"Captain, I have attempted to convince you that the Vulcan way is impossible for you, but you will not accept that the strength differential cannot be surmounted."

Kirk roused himself a little and looked up into his friend's eyes. "I want to learn Vulcan techniques, Spock. Teach me." Spock's face kept wavering in and out of focus. Kirk blinked and tried to concentrate; nothing would stay still. "But can't you ease off a little? Every time you touch me, I see stars..."

Spock frowned in disapproval. "Jim, it is impossible to see stars when in the gymnasium, there is no viewscreen here."

Kirk groaned at the Vulcan's literal interpretation of his words. "Spock." He shook his head in a further attempt to clear his disorientation, but that only served to make it worse. Another wave of dizziness overtook him and he shivered. "Spock," he complained, "you're too much for me!" He leaned back against the firm reality of the Vulcan shoulder and closed his eyes. "If I could learn it, what an advantage I would have. It would save me using so much energy."

Perspiration dripped from him. His body burned with intense heat - his own plus the warmer-than-Human temperature of the Vulcan who held him - but he could not summon up the strength or will to pull himself away, for Spock would steady him sooner than anything, or anyone, could do.

Every day this week, he had been trying to learn the Vulcan nerve-pinch...

Every day this week, he had suffered its devastating effects...

Every day this week, he had tried it out on Spock and he had failed miserably; the bony Vulcan shoulder had resisted all his attempts...

Every day this week, steely fingertips had pressed into his neck causing unconsciousness - bruising - aches and pains - despite the care Spock had taken...

The First Officer had explained all about the vulnerable area and how to apply pressure in a particular way. He had demonstrated stage by stage how to achieve it, with his Captain as the willing guinea pig. Still, Kirk had not been able to manage it, and now after too many painful lessons he was on the verge of giving up.

He groaned again. He hated giving up. Jim Kirk did not give up...

Spock's voice broke into his fogged brain. "Captain, perhaps you should concede defeat over this."

Concede! Never... It was then the idea came to him with amazing clarity. So simple; why had he not thought of it before?

"I've got it. If I saw you demonstrate it on someone else, then I would see exactly what you were doing and could attempt to copy." He sat up slowly as the room began to settle back into place. "Yes... that's it. I'll ask for volunteers."

The nerve-pinch sessions had drawn a rich and varied audience all week. Every crewmember not on duty had crushed into the gymnasium each time the two commanding officers were there. All watched with a mixture of awe and amazement, and the bets taken on the Captain ever achieving his goal were not favourable.

As the fifty-five members of the audience heard Kirk's words, there was an undignified scramble for the nearest exit.

"I do not believe that volunteers will be easy to find," Spock observed.

Kirk rubbed at his neck, but it failed to help the numbness which now spread along his shoulder and into his arm. He bent his head down and sat with shoulders slumped. Too many nerve-pinches were agonising! Strong fingers began to knead the aching area and slowly a warm glow began to ease his tender muscles. He sighed with relief and at that moment, inspiration hit him; a grin formed on his face. He knew how he could get volunteers... but he wondered how he was going to get the Vulcan's agreement.

"Impossible," Spock said firmly, as Kirk suggested his idea.

"Aw, Spock, you did it for me!"

Embarrassment exuded from the half-naked Vulcan who sat on the mat in the now empty gymnasium. "I am not a masseur," he replied, stiffly.

"That was the best massage I've ever had," Kirk said, with a smile. "If you ever wanted to change profession, you would have a brilliant career as a masseur."

"Really, Captain!" Spock exclaimed, his eyebrows raised in shock.

"Please, Spock," Kirk tried to convince. "How else will anyone else allow themselves to be a guinea pig? They've all seen what you've done to me. I have to offer some incentive... some... um... reward."

"A massage from the First Officer would not be seemly, Captain," Spock said.

"It would have them lining up in the corridor," Kirk said with a laugh.

"NO," came the definite reply. "Sir."

Kirk sighed deeply. Well he had tried, but what else would induce his crew to take part in such an experiment? Double rations of ice-cream? He doubted it.

The message from the Captain was heard all over the ship.

"All hands, this is the Captain. Volunteers are needed for some experimentation involving close co-operation with Mr Spock. Please report to the gymnasium at 1500 hours. The experiment will cause some physical discomfort, but I can assure you that it will be most interesting and ... rewarding. Kirk out."

428 crewmembers stood silently. All knew what the experiment was. All wondered how being knocked out by the Vulcan nerve-pinch could be interesting and rewarding.

No-one volunteered.

Kirk paced the empty gymnasium at 1530 hours. Spock stood watching him calmly. "Dammit, why has no-one turned up? Where is their sense of adventure? Where is their curiosity? Where...?" He broke off as he saw a tall form at the door. "Ah.. come in," he said, a wide grin breaking out upon his face. "Come on."

Spock's mouth hung open for a second as Christine Chapel hesitatingly entered. He pressed his lips together and swallowed hard.

Kirk glanced at him amusedly, then walked forward to clasp the woman's arm and bring her over. He had not expected any of his female crew to volunteer for this, and silently, he chastised himself. He was a little old-fashioned about women. It still startled him when they did not want to be protected, when they came across as the highly-trained professionals that they were, and expected to be treated in the same way as the men. Yet, he doubted if Christine's motivation was professional. He had overheard her comment last night in the Rec Room as she had voiced her envy of her Captain being held in the Vulcan's arms. If he had heard it - Spock certainly had.

Kirk could almost feel the heat of Spock's embarrassment as Christine stammered, "I'm v..v..volunteering, sir ..f..for the exp..p..experiment, sir."

He took a deep breath. "I see, Nurse Chapel," he said, trying to keep his voice in a brisk and businesslike tone. Could he refuse her without insulting and upsetting her? Yet she was all that they had. What a predicament to be in! He turned to Spock, ruthlessly passing the buck. "Well, Mr Spock?"

The Vulcan had turned a deeper shade of green. He cleared his throat, obviously aware of Christine's open hungry looks at him. Kirk watched in fascination as the woman's eyes raked over Spock's hairy chest then onto the lower half of the body, revealingly enclosed in tight practice leggings. Her face had taken on a heightened colour and she constantly ran her tongue over her lips.

Kirk knew that if any woman looked at him in such a way his reaction and the subsequent events would be unavoidable, but Spock only shifted slightly under Chapel's

intense scrutiny, clasped his hands more tightly behind him and replied, "Very well, Ms Chapel. Please undo your uniform."

A deep flush spread through the nurse's face and body at that request.

Spock swallowed hard. "Your shoulder must be exposed if I am to demonstrate fully to Captain Kirk."

Without a moment's hesitation, Christine unfastened her tunic to reveal one very smooth, pale shoulder. Kirk's eyes widened. He had always been turned on by a woman's bare shoulder, but taking a deep, calming breath he reminded himself that this was an experiment.

Christine stood, trembling slightly, her hands clasped tightly together. "W..will it hurt, Mr Spock?" she asked, her voice husky.

Spock's reply was terse. "Slightly."

Chapel blinked, glanced at Kirk, who smiled reassuringly at her, trying with his most charming manner to gain her trust. He knew though that it was wasted on her. Christine had never fallen for his usual routine of 'I'll protect you, little lady', his old-world chivalry. She worshipped Spock with unrequited passion, living in hope that one day he would turn to her, sweep her off her feet and carry her to his cabin. No-one else existed for her.

"Captain, if you will stand behind Nurse Chapel." Spock interrupted his thoughts. He gave a guilty start. "Captain?" Spock inquired, no doubt sensing his mood.

"Oh... yes," he replied, attempting nonchalance, but he immediately moved to stand beside Spock at Chapel's back, and concentrated as his friend once again tried to teach him the procedure.

Christine shivered as Spock's hand moved across the line of her shoulder, only centimetres away from touching her; waves of hot desire coursed through her as she felt his breath stir her hair. She imagined him sliding his arms about her, pulling her against him, kissing her passionately.

She heard his voice, faintly. "Try it now, Captain."

Kirk's strong fingers pinched her at the join of neck and shoulder. She winced as the painful pressure lanced through her shoulderblades, but did not feel any signs of unconsciousness coming on. Kirk muttered under his breath and tried again. Christine whimpered in pain and Kirk immediately withdrew his hand, apologising profusely.

Chapel smiled a little. "It's all right, sir," she said, glancing back at him.

"I will do it to her," Spock said. "With your permission, Nurse Chapel?"

Christine's eyes shone. "Oh yes, Mr, Spock... yes..."

She closed her eyes, awaiting the moment he would touch her, the moment when his sensitive fingertips would rest on her bare skin. Her heart thumped, the blood coursed hotly through her veins, she could sense the heat of his body close behind her, feel him reach out towards her. Blackness claimed her before his hand could settle upon her neck...

As she suddenly slumped, Kirk reacted instinctively by gallantly catching her in his arms. The sudden dead weight of her body caught him by surprise and, losing his balance, he fell back to land unceremoniously on the floor.

"I do not understand," Spock said, confusedly. "I have not implemented the nerve-pinch yet." He frowned, staring down at the Humans who lay sprawled at his feet.

Kirk gasped for breath, struggling to free himself from under the tall, statuesque form of the Head Nurse.

"It is illogical," Spock continued. "Can you explain, Captain?" His frown deepened as his Captain did not respond. "Jim, what is the matter? Is Nurse Chapel ill? Shall I summon Dr McCoy?"

Kirk did not mind having women lying on top of him, but he preferred them small and - better still - conscious. Chapel was neither. Her long blonde hairstyle had come undone, thick strands lay heavily across - and in - his mouth, they covered his eyes, blinding him; her face pressed heavily into his Adam's apple, almost causing him to choke; her very female body pinned him to the ground - her weight seemed to have trebled in the last few seconds. Heady perfume filled his nostrils, making his head reel.

"Captain, have you fallen asleep?"

Silently swearing, Kirk managed to shift some of Chapel's hair from his mouth. "Get her off me!" he yelled.

Immediately responding to that order, Spock lifted the Nurse from the Captain, gently placed her down on the mat, then knelt down between them both. Kirk was covered in sweat. He lay flat on his back, breathing heavily, weak with relief. He had almost suffocated under the body of the tall nurse. She was a lot of woman, maybe too much for him... He caught himself; what was he thinking? No woman was too much for James T. Kirk...

"Captain, please explain what has happened?" Spock asked, his confusion over the events of the past minute overcoming his normal reserve.

Kirk struggled to lean up on his elbows and look at his friend. "She was not exactly the ideal volunteer, Spock. She fainted."

"Fainted!" Spock exclaimed, sitting back on his heels to stare at Kirk in puzzlement.

"Yes, she fainted."

"But why? Ms Chapel is a strong, healthy young female."

"Spock," Kirk warned, "don't act the innocent with me. She'd jump into bed with you in a minute."

Spock's frown deepened further. "Why would she want to 'jump' into bed with me, Jim? Even if she did consider such an illogical act, she certainly is unable to in such a short time from now. There are no signs of her regaining consciousness."

Kirk raised his eyes to the ceiling, flopped back onto the ground and wondered - despairingly - what he had done to deserve his Vulcan friend...

Annoyed by the lack of response from his crew, Kirk called the three duty Security Officers to the briefing room. They stood in line as he paced up and down in front of them. All were aware of his disapproval, and they wisely kept silent, afraid to stir his well-known temper.

Finally he stopped and faced them. "I asked for volunteers and only one person came forward - one 'person' from the medical section. Not one 'man' from my highly trained, tough Security team was willing to face the Vulcan nerve-pinch." He stared at the tall, muscular Lt Galloway. "Well, Galway?" he barked. "What have you to say for yourself?"

"Galloway, sir," the young man replied.

"What!"

"My name is Galloway, sir," the Lieutenant replied.

Kirk shook his head. What was the man talking about? "Are you receiving me, Lt Galway?" he asked with a slight touch of sarcasm.

"Galloway is in Scotland, sir. Galway is in Ireland."

That was the final straw for a confused and angered Captain. "If I want a geography lesson, Galway, I'll ask for it."

The Security Officer winced at the reprimand, shuddered and looked down, unable to meet his Captain's eyes.

Kirk turned his attention to the next man. "Mr Leslie," he said gently, trying to keep his rage under control. "How about you?"

Leslie's eyes darted back and forth. "I'm fine, sir," he finally replied.

"You're fine!" Kirk exclaimed, unable to believe his ears.

"Yes, sir. Thank you, sir."

Kirk's face reddened with fury and disbelief. Leslie often misunderstood him, but this was ridiculous. He would have to do something about the man. He returned his attention to the first man. "Lt Johnson, surely the Vulcan nerve-pinch does not frighten a man of your experience and strength?"

"Galloway, sir." The quavering voice of the red-shirted lieutenant corrected.

"What! What!" Kirk exclaimed in total amazement.

"My name is Galloway, sir. Not Galway, not Johnson. Why can't you get my name right, sir?"

Kirk scratched his head. Was it just him, or was everyone and everything falling to pieces? He slumped down into his chair, trying to understand why he could not communicate with his men any more. A captain's lot was not an easy one ...

He scrutinised the Security team. "Garrovick," he said. The young man was more intelligent than most of the others, surely he would be able to understand his Captain's wishes.

"Sir," Garrovick said, standing stiffly to attention.

"You volunteered once before," Kirk said. Of course, he should have spoken to the eager young officer sooner. Garrovick had jumped at the chance of beaming down to Tycho IV to get a shot at destroying the cloud-creature. He was ideal.

"Yessir," Garrovick conceded.

"And?" Kirk encouraged.

"Never again, sir," Garrovick said, his handsome young face resolute. "I didn't know then that if you got killed, you had to carry on with your duties, like Mr Leslie and Mr Galloway here."

Kirk groaned with frustration. Why were all his officers being so obstinate?

"That's right," Leslie said. "It's not fair." It was an old gripe of his.

"I agree," Galloway said, "but at least they still call you by your correct name. You see what I have to put up with?"

"Gentlemen," Kirk tried to placate them... reason with them. "No-one will get killed. No-one will be hurt. You will only feel a little pain."

"Begging your pardon, sir," Leslie persisted. "You have been in a lot of pain."

"That's because Mr Spock has been doing it to me all week!" Kirk exclaimed, "I need a rest. I need to watch him do it to someone else. I need someone to practise on. I need volunteers. I order you all to volunteer."

The men glanced at each other and came to silent agreement. "No, sir," Leslie spoke for them all. He had defied Kirk in the past, and had automatically stepped into the position of their leader.

"NO? Did you say no?" Kirk fumed with anger. He slammed his fist down upon the desk. "I'm the Captain.... I'm the Captain... Do as I tell you..." Defy him? How dare they!

The tough Security men quailed before him; even Leslie's resolve began to fail him.

"Come with me to the gym," Kirk ordered.

Leslie gathered his strength about him, raised his eyebrows and looked up at the ceiling. Bolstered by the admiring glances of the other two men, he was determined to face Kirk down.

"Are you refusing to obey me, Mr Leslie?" Kirk asked.

"Sir," Leslie said, fearlessly staring into his Captain's face now, undaunted by the fury there. "It's not that I want to disobey you, sir... but may I speak frankly to you, sir?" He stepped forward, boldly. He would go where no man had gone before. He would defy Captain Kirk and he would win.

"Oh, feel free, Mr Leslie," Kirk said, bemusedly. "Why should I care? What the hell, call me Jim if you like. You don't think of me as your Captain any more, why should I bother?" He leaned his chin on his hand and sighed with resignation.

Leslie smiled. "Yessir... I mean... Jim." He cleared his throat. "Jim, we don't want to go to the gym with you, because - Jim - if we go to the gym, we will all end up unconscious when Mr Spock shows you the nerve-pinch. It'll look really stupid if the three Security Officers on duty are all incapacitated, Jim. So, Jim, that's why we don't want to go to the gym, Jim. If you see what I mean, Jim. The gym, Jim, is a place, we all go, Jim, for.."

Kirk exploded. "That's it. You are all ordered to the gym.. the gymnasium, where you will take part in the nerve-pinch experiment. I will not take 'no' for an answer. You will obey me. Go at once. On the double.. men."

Defeated, the men turned and filed out of the room, their heads low, their morale even lower; all but Lieutenant Leslie, whose peeved voice filtered back to his outraged Commander.

"I know he's the Captain, but what a nerve!"



TRIBBLES

On the great ship Enterprise
Sailing out in space
The tribbles are multiplying at an even greater rate;
Eating tritcale as fast as they can;
Even the Captain doesn't know what they're up to yet -
Poor man!

There are tribbles in engineering, making Scotty swear,
Tribbles in the sickbay - LOOK OUT! McCoy -
Don't sit on that one there!

There are tribbles in the rec room,
In living quarters too;
Tribbles in the cupboards,
Even in the loo!

Tribbles on the bridge
And in the turbolifts;
On Uhura's console -
Kirk nearly has a fit!

The tribbles are then rounded up
And sent upon their way;
But then Uhura finds one
And this one has to stay...

(Spock likes this tribble and is seen stroking it!)

Jenny Turner



RESCUE PLAN

(Beautiful Alien Lady III)

by

Mrs Pippin

Attention, please! It's me again
With yet another story,
A tale of conflict in the Fleet
And squabbles over glory.

Through the doors of Fleet Headquarters, down the corridors of power
Came an unexpected Starship delegation.
With one notable exception came the Captains of the Fleet
To complain at biased duty allocation.
They were tired of coming second every time adventure beckoned,
Of the routine boring nature of their work.
They'd prepared a signed petition with a list of every mission
Bringing honour and prestige to James T Kirk.

They complained of dull assignments while the Enterprise saved worlds,
Of shipping freight while Kirk and Co. had fun;
Of charting endless starmaps while a certain ship sailed out,
Returning every time with medals won.
They expressed their deep frustration at the lack of exploration,
Described their low morale and mental strain,
And confirmed the rumoured story that the quest for fame and glory
Was the reason Starship Captains went insane.

They recalled poor Garth of Izar, Matthew Decker's sad demise,
And Captain Tracy's mad immortal plan,
And the tale of Captain Merrick with his Roman Empire hopes,
And Lester's strange attempt to be a man.
When those tragic souls recruited they'd appeared ideally suited
For a life of noble deeds in Fleet Command,
But when sent on Starfleet missions they'd pursued their own ambitions,
And power-crazy schemes got out of hand.

The 'Powers-That-Be' were shaken by the cries of discontent,
Complaints that Starfleet rules were quite unfair.
They claimed it was coincidence that when they needed help
The Starship Enterprise was always there.
The other crews were able (if their Captains' minds were stable)
To deal with threatened planet-wide disaster.
They needn't feel dejected at the honours Kirk collected,
Or the fact his crew solved problems so much faster.

The delegation named their price, demanding equal work,
 An equal share of fame for equal pay;
 An equal share of glory for each Starship in the Fleet,
 An equal chance to bravely save the day.
 They advised the Federation to give consideration
 To treating all its Starship crews alike.
 If one ship's five-year mission grabbed all the recognition,
 Twelve like it in the Fleet would go on strike.

Then followed many frantic hours while Starfleet heads conferred,
 And plans to solve the crisis were defined.
 They allocated daring quests to those who longed for fame,
 And all prestigious tasks were reassigned.
 They had to take quick action to ease dissatisfaction -
 They could not risk a Fleet reduced to one.
 The ships were redirected, but they carelessly neglected
 To tell the Enterprise what they had done.

Our noble ship had carried out her latest daring quest,
 A tyranny overthrown, a planet saved;
 A grateful new addition to the Federation's ranks,
 And freedom for a people long enslaved.
 We had time for recreation, ship-wide rest and relaxation
 While waiting for our next exciting mission;
 Alas, we had no notion of the Fleet HQ commotion,
 The Federation's difficult position.

In blissful, peaceful ignorance the Enterprise sailed on,
 Quite unaware of imminent distress.
 The sound of Bantu star-song filled the recreation lounge
 Where Kirk and Mr Spock were playing chess.
 The Doctor watched their movements, suggesting some improvements,
 A master of the art of Vulcan-baiting.
 His greatest satisfaction was in watching Spock's reaction
 For signs of Vulcan poise disintegrating.

The Scottish Engineer relaxed with technical reports,
 The Helmsman found new hobbies to pursue.
 As Yeoman to the Captain I found time to sort his shirts -
 He'd recently ripped holes in one or two.
 We cruised the Starfleet borders, awaiting further orders,
 Prepared for yet another daring trip;
 But no transmission sought us, no word from Fleet Headquarters,
 No sight or sound of any other ship.

James Kirk became impatient at the lack of Fleet response,
 Desire for action heightened day by day.
 The Vulcan was instructed to increase the scanners' range
 To clarify the reason for delay.

After hours of concentration, he passed on his information,
 Confirming that our ship was quite alone.
 Until reallocated, the Enterprise was fated
 To endlessly patrol the Neutral Zone.

So days of forced inaction passed; the Enterprise sailed on
 Her endless, uneventful star patrol.
 The steel-like nerves of crewmen snapped, the atmosphere grew tense,
 As dull routine and boredom took their toll.
 Then came the unexpected - a beacon was detected.
 A standard Fleet distress buoy came in view.
 Its message was unloaded, and carefully decoded -
 An urgent plea for help from Fleet HQ.

"Attention, Captain James T Kirk," the message tape began,
 "Your expertise is needed at the double.
 We've sent your Starship colleagues out on enterprising quests,
 And need your help to get them out of trouble.
 They wanted satisfaction, more Pieces of the Action,
 The higher profile jobs they felt they'd earned.
 We therefore reassigned them, but now we cannot find them,
 All contact lost, no single ship returned."

"Department Heads to Briefing Room!" the Captain's call rang out.
 "Prepare for yet another daring trip.
 A mission from Headquarters, they've mislaid the Fleet en masse;
 Our orders are to seek out every ship."
 With some useful information on each vessel's destination
 A conference began without delay.
 With new worlds to be discovered and the Fleet to be recovered
 The Enterprise was boldly on her way.

We first set out for Janus VI; one ship had been involved
 In checking out suspected sabotage,
 Investigating rumours from a mining colony
 That tunnel-roaming monsters were at large.
 Kirk assessed the situation and arranged a confrontation;
 Demands to kill the creature were ignored.
 Spock melded with the Horta, the Doctor healed with mortar,
 And peaceful co-existence was restored.

We then sought out a second ship - the last HQ had heard
 Her Captain had ignored a warning buoy
 And faced an unknown vessel of enormous size and power
 Whose single aim in mind was to destroy.
 We approached the known position of the Starship's last transmission,
 Uhura tried all frequencies to raise her.
 I knew before we'd finished ship-wide power would be diminished.
 So practised heating coffee with my phaser.

With poker face and corbomite our Captain stood his ground,
 Ignoring Vulcan pleas to stick to chess.
 He bluffed his way through threats of death to face his foe at last -
 A tiny one-man vessel in distress.
 We offered our assistance and met with no resistance,
 Our actions meant we'd passed a vital test.
 With rescue bid completed, and new-found ally greeted,
 We left behind a crewman as his guest.

The third ship, so our briefing went, had saved from certain death
 A trader known as Harcourt Fenton Mudd.
 When chaos and catastrophe developed in his wake
 Our Captain all too clearly understood.
 No rehabilitation could alter Mudd's vocation,
 An interstellar nuisance all his life.
 But Kirk had ammunition to threaten Mudd's position -
 The help of Harry's dear devoted wife.

The fourth beleaguered Starship had met their Waterloo
 While shipping tons of high-grade hybrid wheat;
 They'd clashed with shore-leave Klingons and introduced a pest
 Which lived to eat and breed (and bred to eat.)
 Instead of multiplying, the furry hordes were dying;
 McCoy found deadly poison in the grain.
 The evil plot was thwarted, all tribble guests transported
 To join their friends the Klingons once again.

The Ultimate Computer game had crippled three more ships,
 The Daystrom M-5 unit running wild.
 Instead of crew replacements as expected, Daystrom had
 Created an unstable, lethal child.
 Our timely intervention gained M-5's full attention,
 We showed how many crewmen could have died.
 Its circuits in confusion produced the sad conclusion,
 Its only course of action - suicide.

The eighth crew deep in trouble had beamed inside a world
 Where age-old living entities were stored
 Who'd occupied the bodies of three willing volunteers
 Until they made their own ones back on board.
 Compared to spheres of plastic real bodies felt fantastic;
 They didn't want the androids they'd designed.
 We found a way of stopping this spate of body swapping
 When Spock and Christine Chapel shared one mind.

We paused for crew rebriefing, then looked for Starship Nine
 Entangled in a tale of ancient Greece,
 Enforced to serve Apollo, the last remaining god,
 And live a simple peasant life of peace.

Kirk's answer was inspired; a yeoman was attired
 In gravity-defying chiffon gown.
 She earned the god's devotion and set the wheels in motion
 To bring the last of Mount Olympus down.

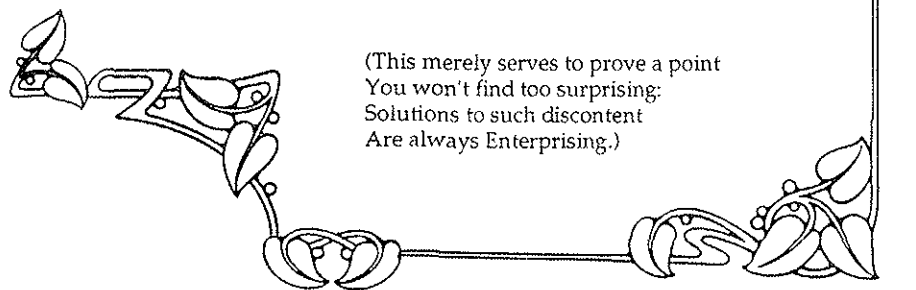
The tenth unhappy Starship crew had shared the Archons' fate;
 The Body had absorbed them one by one.
 They now existed peacefully in harmony and love,
 The thirst for exploration sadly gone.
 The source of all transmissions confirmed our worst suspicions -
 Another damned computer in control!
 Reducing smart machinery to bits of molten scenery
 Achieved a certain Captain's lifelong goal.

Eleventh on our rescue list we found a stricken crew
 With fever, and no antidote in sight.
 We had to find a planet source abundant in the drug
 To ease our ailing comrades' tragic plight.
 This cure was soon detected, and Kirk found, as expected,
 A blonde and brainy android (Flint-designed.)
 His amorous flirtations caused fatal complications;
 The pain of indecision blew her mind.

The end of our crusade in sight, we reached the final ship.
 Its life-support was fading by the hour.
 A vast one-celled creation used energy for food
 And slowly drained the ship and crew of power.
 If this bringer of destruction considered reproduction
 Catastrophe with countless deaths would follow.
 We stopped the infestation, prescribed some medication -
 An anti-matter pill it couldn't swallow.

So back to Fleet headquarters the Enterprise returned,
 Twelve grateful battered Starships in her wake.
 Their Captains (and the Powers-That-Be) apologised to Kirk,
 Acknowledged the extent of their mistake.
 This lesson would be heeded whenever help was needed
 For future wild adventures out in space.
 Our Starship's five-year mission was back in her position -
 Twelve like her in the Fleet now knew their place.

(This merely serves to prove a point
 You won't find too surprising:
 Solutions to such discontent
 Are always Enterprising.)



EYE EYE, SIR

by

David Gallagher

Captain James T Kirk shifted uncomfortably in his chair. He could feel the beginnings of a headache behind his eyes, and squinted as he tried to bring the words he was reading back into focus. When that didn't work he held the book away from himself to see if that was any better.

The book he was reading was a work of fiction, set some time in the future and following the exploits of a crew aboard a Starship. It was very well written, and Kirk was enjoying it, for the most part, but he couldn't agree with the idea of having a Klingon as part of the Bridge crew, though he thought that the android was a fun idea. Still, the author was entitled to use artistic licence.

Eventually, after much squinting and straining his eyes, Kirk closed the book decisively. It was no good - he was going to have to do something about his eyes. He had tried an old Earth remedy that Dr McCoy had recently rediscovered, called 'Optrex', but he didn't like the taste of it.

So it was that Kirk found himself outside an opticians in the shopping quarter of San Francisco. He entered the shop and approached the man behind the counter, saying,

"Hello, there. I've come for an eye test - I'm having some trouble with my eyesight."

To which the man replied, "I think you're right, sir. This is the butcher's - the optician's is next door."

And so - coughing loudly to cover his embarrassment - Kirk went next door and told the optician that he needed his eyes tested.

The optician confirmed this by answering, "Ah, yes, sir - I knew that as soon as you walked in... through our plate glass window."

After Kirk had mumbled an apology - and paid for the damage - the optician continued by asking, "Have you ever had your eyes checked before, Captain?"

Kirk answered, "No, they've always been this colour."

With that the optician took Kirk by the arm and led him outside. He pointed up in the air and asked, "Captain, what is that blue stuff up there?"

"That's the sky," Kirk answered.

"That's right. And what's that big yellow thing up there?"

Kirk answered, "That's the sun."

So the optician said, "That's right, Captain. Now how much bloody further do you want

to see?"



UHURA

(Dedicated to Nichelle Nichols)

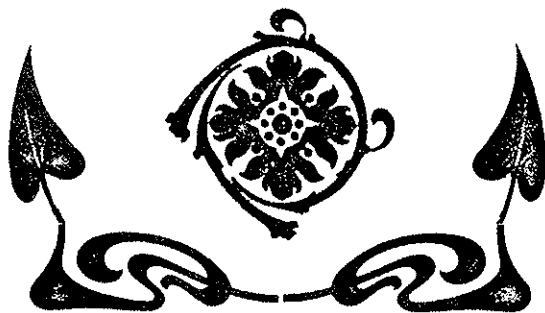
Your name means 'Freedom',
And yours is the voice
That keeps the ship in touch
With the rest of the galaxy.

If a landing party beams down to an unknown planet
And danger strikes,
Yours is the voice they hear
Keeping them in touch with the ship.

But communications is not your only talent,
For you are also a gifted singer and musician,
And you often sing and play for the crew in the rec room,
Especially the Captain's favourite song, 'Beyond Antares'.

You are Nyota Uhura,
And you travel the stars,
Helping to bring peace and understanding
To the many alien races of the galaxy.

Christine J Jones



GOODBYES

by

Katrina Heintz

I stood by the Starbase lounge window watching the Enterprise preparing to leave. My goodbyes to friends had all been said, now I had to say goodbye to the dream. Tears began to mist my sight as I remembered the adventures we had had, both good and bad.

When I first arrived on board her as a shy teenager, I was too shy to say boo to anyone, never mind speak to any of the Bridge crew. Then the Captain asked for a yeoman. I was appointed - me, the youngest member of the crew. I received quite a few odd comments about that. With all the kindness and help I received from the command team, especially Uhura, I soon ignored the jokes and snide remarks. It was an incredible experience, being part of that Bridge crew. The Captain was terrific to work for, and although Mr Spock scared the living daylights out of me at first, I soon coped. It seems so long ago now, even though I know it's not.

As I watched the ship go into warp, leaving a rainbow flash of colours behind, it brought back many memories. One was of a young boy trying to cope with Human emotions for the first time. Charlie Evans was his name. No-one knew how to deal with him, least of all me. I cry for him still, unable to be with his own kind, forever bound to Thasus and its incorporeal inhabitants by the unique powers they had given him to let him survive.

Survival... Another memory came unbidden to my mind, of a struggle by two separate identities which should have been one, the time when the transporter malfunctioned and split the Captain in two. That was one of the worst times we had for me personally, a stupid accident which nearly cost several lives, including mine. Jim Kirk's personality was split, half good, kind, but weak; the other strong, evil and malicious. I had begun to care for the Captain personally by that time, and though I knew nothing could come of it, still the hope was there. When the evil half attacked me in my cabin I hated him then, and wanted him destroyed, but I knew that if he was the good half would not survive.

Both halves were eventually rejoined, and I celebrated with the rest, but something had changed. The Captain was different; he began to resent the fact that he had a female yeoman. I knew he had said that if he had to have a yeoman, why did it have to be a woman? I must have hidden my feelings from my crewmates well; there were no whispered conversations, no embarrassed looks as I walked into a room, and believe me, on a Starship you soon know if you're the current target of gossip.

More memories welled up with fresh tears, of when we encountered the Romulan ship for the first time and they fired on us with their new weapon. I stood on the Bridge at the Captain's side, and even amid the tension of the attack I felt his protection. The wishful thinking of a woman in love? Maybe.

Surprisingly, I was rostered to be a member of the landing party to that nightmare of a planet occupied only by children - I didn't go on landing parties as a rule. I watched the Captain with Miri, and felt incredible jealousy at the tenderness I saw. My heart said, *It should be me*, while my head told me she was just a child - a 300-year-old one, but still a child. I was lucky, I suppose. The disease didn't work as fast on me as on the others, though I still became angry and irritable. It was just a small thing, dropping the vial, but I lost control and fled the

lab. The Captain followed me out. Perhaps it was the disease, or just a last chance for happiness before it was too late, but I asked him to look at my legs. I had always wanted him to notice them; now they were covered in massive, ugly, discoloured blotches - not the prettiest of sights. Tears began to run down my cheeks. He did nothing except hold me. As I stood encircled in that comforting embrace I looked over at Miri's face framed in the doorway and saw myself reflected there in her eyes. Finally I realised that much as I cared for Jim Kirk he would never return the feeling in the way I wanted.

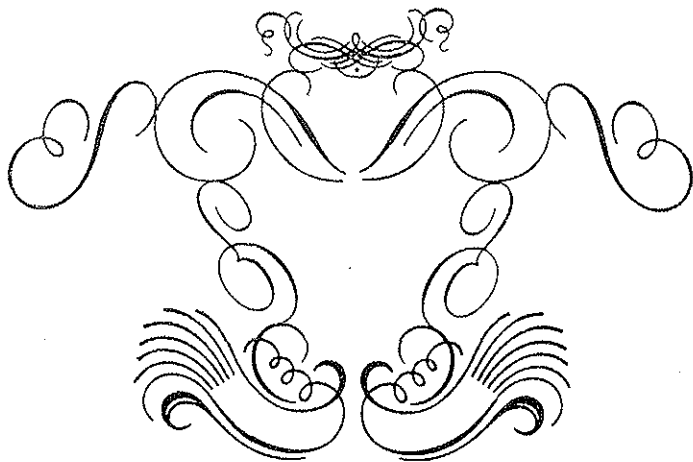
I found out later that he almost shook Miri apart to find me. As a member of the crew I was important, but not for any other reason. I couldn't help the way I felt any more than he could, so I decided to leave the ship as soon as possible. When the post with Commodore Stone came up I applied, was accepted, and posted here to the Starbase.

I knew my friends would be puzzled by my sudden departure, but I felt it was for the best. I tried to give a convincing explanation without giving away my real reason - successfully, I hope.

Being on the Enterprise was the best time of my life. I will always care for Jim Kirk, and I suppose many others will too - that smile of his could melt the hardest of hearts. At least we part with feelings intact, no bitter words said, no recriminations. I will miss them, all my friends on the Enterprise, and I wish them well for the future.

My dearest wish would be to travel with you again among the stars. Che sara, sara. May good fortune smile on you all, my friends, especially the one with the hazel eyes.

I turn away now from the window. The ship has gone, and so must I. Time to start a new life here on the Starbase and banish the tears - at least for today.



MEMORIES

by

Sandy Catchick

"Do what you can for him, Bones!"

Jim Kirk's words resounded in my head as I dropped back down on my knees beside Spock's inert body. Jim's eyes had blazed with undisguised pain and anguish as Captain Tracey's phaser had caught Spock in the periphery of its blast.

"He'll live. But I'll have to get him to better facilities than these," I'd stated aloud to banish that grief from Jim's mind and leave him free to fight the insane Captain Tracey. Tracey's wild dreams of longevity - or perhaps the loss of his whole crew - had driven him mad, and here on Omega IV he'd broken the Prime Directive and abandoned the oath he'd taken as a Starship Captain. Tracey had a position here as leader of the oriental race that had settled this planet. He had power too. Somehow I couldn't see him giving his permission for me to take Spock to better facilities. On first sight he had taken a dislike to the Vulcan. Perhaps it was because of Spock's alienness, but I thought it more likely that it was because Spock had made it plain to Tracey that the Vulcan could conceive of no valid reason a Captain could give to break his oath. Tracey's parting words had made it plain that he had no respect left for life, Human or alien, except perhaps for his own. Jim had gone with Tracey only because Tracey had threatened to kill both of us if he didn't.

There was little I could do for Spock without my medical kit. Oh, I had computers aplenty and a biocomp provided at Tracey's request to assist in my search for the miracle cure. That's what I found so frustrating. This time I had all the computer hardware I could possibly need, but I hadn't got more than a field medical kit - and the fact remained that Spock was down because of a phaser blast. A phaser set to kill without thought for the life, dreams and hopes that dwelt within that Vulcan facade he presented to the world, an almost perfect facade that had once fooled a lonely doctor when he took up his first post as Chief Medical Officer aboard the Enterprise.

Spock might yet die, but this time I'd make sure he knew it was with friends who saw him truly as a Vulcan who had shown us the best his planet had to offer - himself.

As I cradled his head on my lap and prayed that his stubborn Vulcan physiology would pull him through for the umpteenth time, I thought back to the first time I'd seen Spock collapse under phaser fire. I berated myself for my own lack of insight that had allowed him to suffer in silence before I'd realised his Vulcan heritage denied him expression but did nothing to protect him from the anguish his caring and gentleness kept so well hidden within.

I grimaced at him sourly as I came out of the turbolift and saw him waiting on the hanger deck.

"First as usual, I see," I said; and then I couldn't resist adding sarcastically, "No doubt you can't wait to get to Indus II to start work on all those formulæ. I guess you're sorry we have to go by shuttlecraft as that will delay your chance to play at Science Officer."

He raised the inevitable eyebrow, but his answer surprised me. "On the contrary, Doctor, I should prefer not to visit Indus II at all."

"What! Do you mean to say you have a feeling about the planet, Spock? I thought you'd be rushing to demonstrate your superiority in the field of science."

He didn't reply, so I figured I had something here worth pursuing. "Why are you coming if you don't want to visit Indus II?"

"My presence was requested."

"You mean Jim ordered you to take charge of the landing party?"

"That was an additional factor."

I laughed. "So for once Jim didn't take your side in an argument."

"There was no argument, Doctor. I expressed my reluctance to visit Indus II but the Captain insisted that as my presence had been specifically requested I should lead the landing party."

"What don't you like about the planet, Spock? Is it the fact that all the colonists are Human?"

"Irrelevant. I would point out that all the crew members aboard this vessel are also Human."

"I'd never have guessed if you hadn't pointed that out, Spock. I admire your powers of observation."

"You are being facetious. It does not become you."

"What is it that you dislike about Indus II?"

"I am somewhat less than enthusiastic about their legal system."

"When are you ever enthusiastic about anything except your computers and your sensors? Don't answer that - it was a rhetorical question, before you go asking. We're going to Indus II to try and help them find a cure for a disease that's decimating the planet. Surely that is more important than any dislike you may have for their legal system?"

"Indeed. Yet I find it ... disconcerting ... that they should request my presence."

"I've never known you to be disconcerted by anything. Did you tell Jim why you didn't want to come?"

"I gave the Captain a full report on the planet, Doctor. Since he felt my presence would be beneficial it is my duty to be here."

"You mean he put you in your place."

"If you are ready, Doctor, the remainder of the party are now aboard the shuttle."

I muttered under my breath about supercilious know-alls being brought down to size,

knowing his keen Vulcan hearing would be able to catch what I said. He didn't reply and I boarded the shuttle in high spirits, feeling I'd won some kind of victory. It wasn't often Jim ordered Spock to do something the Vulcan didn't want to do. There were times I felt Spock had too much influence on the Captain, since Jim seemed to take his advice before anyone else's, including my own. Looking back on it I guess that's what really hurt. I felt that Spock had the Captain's ear, while I was left out in the cold. Yet it was Spock who appeared cold to me. Cold, unfeeling and unresponsive. Who could think about the legal system of a planet when lives were being lost to an epidemic? Only a Vulcan. Only Spock.

We made the journey to Indus II in just 36 hours. Jim confirmed that the Enterprise would be back to pick us up in 12 days time and he wished us luck with finding a cure. He smiled and added, "And for those of you who don't believe in luck, I've sent my best scientist and my best medical practitioner, so I know you'll be successful, gentlemen." Jim has a way with words that makes you feel worthwhile. I had been somewhat less than enthusiastic about the likelihood of our success, but Jim's words encouraged me.

I asked Spock to fill us in about the planet, telling him to ignore the legal system and concentrate on what he knew about the people, the medical facilities, the atmosphere etc. To give him his due, he had researched everything and gave us a faultless expose of the planet. It seemed that they were an Old-Earth colony set up a century ago to get away from the over-mechanistic, over-computerised world in which they found themselves. I had some sympathy for their view - I hated it every time I had to use the transporter and let my molecules be scattered all over the universe. I was glad that this was one assignment where we'd had to take the shuttle because the Enterprise couldn't afford the time to take us within beaming range of Indus.

We had very little information on the disease itself. All we knew was that the inhabitants had suddenly started falling like flies (my words, not Spock's laborious explanation of the same facts). Spock seemed content to spend the time with the shuttle's computers. More to his taste than Human company, no doubt. Most of us spent the time sleeping, or talking quietly.

Our landing was one of the smoothest I've ever experienced. I hadn't realised we'd touched down until Spock advised us to unfasten our seatbelts and disembark. His quick reflexes do have their uses every now and then. We'd been told not to bring any computers with us, since the planet considered them to be a danger to their way of life. I realised that was why Spock had spent so much time with the shuttle computers. He was going to miss them for a whole 12 days. The thought made me smile. Spock caught my smile and raised an eyebrow.

"Just thinking," I told him disarmingly.

"An auspicious occasion," he responded, and I spluttered a heated reply half under my breath. It wouldn't do to call the First Officer names in front of our welcome committee.

The three Humans who came forward to greet us were somewhat surprised by our appearance and their rehearsed speech stuttered to a standstill.

"What are you doing here?" asked their leader, facing Spock.

"Your planetary synod requested our presence to assist in finding a cure for the disease that is attacking your planet. We are from the Starship Enterprise. I am First Officer Spock. This is Dr McCoy, Chief Medical Officer. Dr Sanchez, Nurses Phelps and Needham, and Ensigns Watts and Pritchard."

"We never asked for a First Officer. What are you doing here?"

"I am also Science Officer. My Captain advised me that my presence was specifically requested. Otherwise I would not be here."

There was an exchange of words between the members of our welcoming committee. Somehow they didn't seem so welcoming now. I got the impression that Spock knew why, but he stood in his usual parade stance and just waited for them to stop talking. He gave no further explanations and ignored the looks the rest of the landing party aimed at him.

"Who is in charge of your party?" asked the leader eventually.

"I am," replied Spock quietly.

The whispered discussion continued for a short while.

"What are your qualifications as Science Officer?" they asked.

"Hang on there," I interrupted. I don't mind running that blasted Vulcan down, but I do have some pride in our ship and I was damned if I was going to stand there and let our First Officer be insulted. "Isn't it enough that Mr Spock is our CHIEF Science Officer? His credentials are impeccable."

Spock raised an eyebrow, no doubt surprised that someone who berated him most of the time should suddenly come to his defence. However, without rancour he continued to list his pretty lengthy credentials. I could see they impressed our welcome committee.

"Wait here," was the eventual response we received.

Well, we waited. I was getting pretty annoyed. After all we'd come here to save lives and I wanted to get on with that task, not stand in the sun while some stupid bureaucrats debated whether we were suitably qualified. It didn't cross my mind that they'd only questioned *Spock's* credentials. I'd just taken it that as he was the leader of the landing party they'd chosen to concentrate on him.

After half an hour the committee returned.

"Welcome," they said in unison. "We must ask you to go through usual arrival procedures, including a search for weapons and for machinery you may have concealed. You appreciate that no machinery is allowed on the planet."

We all nodded.

"I will search your shuttlecraft," added the leader. "If you will accompany my colleagues to the Port of Indus building, where you will be individually searched?"

"Watch you don't damage any of my medical equipment," I shouted hastily, knowing that these could be taken as machinery if I wasn't careful. We'd spent a long time deciding what to bring that would pass muster as being medical equipment rather than medical machinery. It seemed to be a subtle difference. Laboratory equipment for blood sampling etc. was acceptable, computer equipment was not. I had included a biocomp as laboratory equipment, to Spock's disgust, but he hadn't quibbled when I told him it was an essential piece of equipment. He'd just said that he hoped that the Indus colony would see it as medical rather than computer equipment. I'd laughed in reply.

Anyway, it seemed that the biocomp passed muster. Nothing was said about it. Each of us was taken into a separate office and searched for hidden equipment. One of the Security ensigns had stupidly hidden a penknife in a leather thong tied to the back of his neck. He'd explained that he wore it permanently and hadn't thought about it when told not to bring weapons with him. They confiscated the weapon, of course, but didn't clap him in irons or anything. I waited for Spock's reaction, expecting the Vulcan to be much harsher with the ensign, but it seemed that Spock was himself being searched at that time. I was grateful he'd missed the commotion and told the ensign to keep his mouth shut about it as far as Spock was concerned.

I was just completing my instructions when Dr Sanchez approached me and said he'd met Spock coming out of the search rooms, and the Vulcan looked like he'd just been sick, but had told him he was quite all right. I knew Spock always said he was all right, so I thought I'd better just take a look at him.

Spock was coming towards me as I followed Sanchez' directions to find him. It seemed he'd been taken to one of the furthest rooms.

"Are you okay, Mr Spock?" I asked. "Dr Sanchez seems to think there may be something wrong."

"I am functional, Doctor." His standard reply.

"You look a bit pale," I said, looking at him more closely. Then I realised what had upset him. The search. They'd searched me too. It wasn't pleasant to have some guard check you over manually to ensure you had nothing hidden on your person. It must be even worse for a Vulcan. I knew how he hated coming for a medical - the first time I'd laid a hand on him he'd jumped physically, and I'd had to explain patiently that other doctors might accept what their instruments told them, but in my book there was nothing like feeling for yourself. He'd accepted stoically on my agreement to warn him if I intended to touch him. We'd got by, but it was an ordeal for both of us.

"I've just realised. I guess the search upset you a bit. Not to worry- it's over now. Don't make a big thing of it, Spock. I know Vulcans don't like that sort of thing, but it's part of this planet's system and we've got to make the best of it."

"Part of their legal system," he said quietly. He looked at me hard for a moment. You know when he's concentrating on you because those eyes just seem to melt all your defences and look straight into your soul.

I shuffled my feet uncomfortably. "They searched all of us," I added, to make it clear we'd all gone through it. Then I tried to joke it off, as I would have done with a Human. "It's no worse than going through one of my medicals, is it?"

He didn't reply, but I assumed he'd accepted my comment as his gaze left my face and he continued on his way towards the rest of the party. Trying to take his mind off the search I asked him to help me carry the items from the shuttlecraft to the medical centre. After giving orders to the rest of the party he accompanied me back to the shuttle. I got him to carry the biocomp, since it was a pretty heavy piece of equipment. I saw the colonists looking at it askance, and prayed they'd accept it as medical equipment. No comments were made, and we got it into the medical centre and had it up and working in no time. Spock carried most of the heavy equipment, and I was grateful for his Vulcan strength. I went so far as to thank him. That was a mistake, since he gave me a lecture on the Human need for thanks being totally illogical.

Before long I forgot all about Spock, as I got into tracing the disease. It seemed I had 82 patients already. This was definitely an epidemic. I had a look at the worst cases, those that had been down the longest and those that had been down the shortest. It seemed to be some kind of epidemic pleurodynia, causing fever and extreme pain in the chest and abdominal areas, but the worst thing was that two to three days after the original attack patients seemed to suffer a relapse that affected the whole system and led to a slow and extremely unpleasant death. I had plenty of medication to help with the pain and to reduce fever, but unless I could find an antidote to the disease I knew I would be unable to save those patients who suffered the total relapse. Nasty. I set right down to work trying to isolate what had caused this particular strain of the disease and what I could do about it.

To give Spock his due, and at the time I had to make a real effort to do that since my view of him was already jaundiced from the first few weeks of our acquaintance, he wasted no time in getting down to work with the information I gave him from the patients I'd seen.

In two days he'd researched everything I'd been able to give him, but the response was a negative one. Neither of us had come up with anything remotely likely to lead us to a cure.

More colonists were going down with the disease daily, and since we got to the stage where Spock hadn't got enough information to work on, I asked him to help me look after some of the less ill patients in the wards. He was not enthusiastic, but agreed reluctantly.

"I know Vulcans don't have much of a bedside manner," I told him, "but these people are too ill to worry much about that. There's a lot you can do just making sure they have all the things they need, that the equipment is working, that they are fed and watered, and that they know someone is taking an interest in them."

"I believe I can do that satisfactorily, Doctor, as long as no discussion is required."

"You don't mind talking to Jim when he's ill," I couldn't help saying.

"True," he said quietly, surprising me since I still wasn't used to his outright honesty. He didn't add anything but headed out into the ward.

It was a big mistake. When I look back on it I realise that it was my worst mistake. Since I didn't understand what was going on I put Spock in a situation that made things difficult for him, and as I didn't understand, I also put the blame firmly at his door. Being the stupid, pig-headed Vulcan that he is and not being very good at communicating with Humans, he accepted the blame.

"What's all the racket about?" I asked hurrying into the general ward.

"The patients seem less than reassured by my presence, Doctor," said a calm, uninflected voice.

My heart sank. That uncooperative Vulcan couldn't even be let loose on the simplest of tasks without upsetting someone with his unresponsive, stiff attitude.

Just then, Bladen, the Head of Security, who was a member of the planetary synod, appeared. "You, out of here!" he said, pointing rudely at Spock.

To my surprise the Vulcan just turned and left, heading for the laboratory.

"What was he doing here, Doctor?" asked Bladen.

"I asked him to be here," I said, annoyed by Bladen's attitude. I didn't like Spock's disdainful approach to Humans, but Bladen's rudeness wasn't any better.

"Look," I added, "whatever his faults, he is an extra pair of hands."

"It doesn't seem as if his extra pair of hands is wanted or needed, Doctor," said Bladen angrily.

I looked around the ward, and Bladen was right. There seemed to be a lot of people who had looked perfectly happy when I did my rounds who were now upset, and one or two were even crying.

"Look, I'm sorry," I said. "I really thought he'd be able to help. I'll make sure he doesn't come in here again."

Bladen nodded, satisfied. "You're doing a good job, Doctor. We appreciate it. It's just that your 'friend' isn't quite so useful."

"Spock's no friend of mine," I said, "but he is the best Science Officer I've ever met. If anyone can find a cure it will be him. That brain of his is rapier sharp."

Bladen seemed unsure of this, but he let it go. I never dreamt my words and that short time on the general ward would put Spock's life in danger. Then, I didn't know much about the legal system on Indus II - and I hadn't given Spock a chance to tell me about it since it seemed so blasted irrelevant.

Hindsight is the best kind of sight. Sitting here on the floor, with Spock still unconscious in my arms, I can see how he'd had no chance to help those poor people in the ward, because they wouldn't accept his help. They were as blind to him as a person as anyone could be. In fact in their eyes he wasn't a person. At that time, in my eyes he wasn't really a person either. His trouble is he's too damned good at keeping that Vulcan mask in place. Only Jim seems to be able to get behind it. I guess I've been lucky enough to see behind it a few times, but never with Jim's easy approach. It's usually a life and death situation, like this one, when Spock lets me see the real man.

Anyway, I'm being sidetracked. When I got back to the lab I gave Spock an earful on upsetting my patients. I was really angry when he had absolutely nothing to say in his defence.

"You didn't take note of a single thing I told you, did you Spock?" I ranted at him. "You wouldn't upset Jim like you upset those poor, sick people."

"I apologise, Doctor. It was not my intention to upset them. It seems that I can best help by working on the scientific side as we first agreed."

I snorted. "That's right. Avoid people and get stuck in with your computers. That's about all you're good for. Printed circuits and central processors are more in your line, aren't they? All I asked you for was a little bit of practical help. I didn't expect you to be Florence Nightingale, Spock, but you could have made an effort. There are times I despair of you."

He didn't even bother to defend himself. "I shall return to the equations," he said equably.

I let him go. I'd just about run out of things to say. What was the point? My barbs

didn't seem to get through that thick hide of his. Computers didn't have feelings to appeal to, anyway. I returned to my own work.

Two nights later we had a breakthrough. One of the young ladies who had contracted the disease went into relapse and survived. She was our first survivor and that gave us hope. Spock came into his own in tracking down just what it was about her that made her survive, but it was slow and painstaking work. I took samples of blood, urine, tissue, bone marrow and everything else I could think of. Spock analysed them all, working long into the night without stopping. Eventually I had to order him to take a break and have something to eat. He complied reluctantly under threat of my declaring him medically unfit if he didn't take a break.

I was just returning from a break myself when I caught the tail end of Spock's argument with Bladen. I call it an argument, but it was pretty one-sided. Bladen got angrier and angrier while Spock calmly and quietly responded to him. However, I knew how infuriating Spock could be when he refused to shout and insisted on his own logic.

"Get away from that computer now. I'm going to destroy it, and if you're in my way I won't hesitate to destroy you with it."

"You are being illogical. The computer is the only chance of survival for your people."

"You would try to defend it. You're nothing more than a computer yourself. Our tests prove it. Just a walking, talking machine. Now stand aside."

"I cannot let you destroy it."

"This phaser is set to kill. If you don't move immediately you'll just get in the line of fire and you'll be one dead Vulcan."

"Then you'll have to kill me."

I was horrified and started running. The scene that met my eyes is one I'll never be able to forget. Spock wasn't even looking at Bladen. He was facing the biocomp and punching buttons as fast as he could. Bladen simply raised his phaser and fired. Spock fell soundlessly to the floor and my biocomp disappeared in a shower of sparks. I knocked the phaser out of Bladen's hand, but I knew I was too late.

"What the hell do you think you're doing? You just committed murder!"

Bladen was a cool customer. "It was the Vulcan's own fault, Doctor, and it wasn't murder."

"Not murder? I heard you say you had your phaser set to kill."

"That's right. It only takes a thirty second blast to kill someone, even on these antiquated phasers of ours. But I didn't kill anyone, Doctor. You see, all I did was aim at a machine and destroy it." He raised the phaser again and aimed at Spock.

I threw myself bodily at him and knocked down his arm. "I only wanted to disintegrate the body," he said icily.

"Don't think I'll let you get away with murder just because there's no body."

He laughed. "It just makes it tidier, Doctor. You need a three minute blast to remove a

body, but thirty seconds to kill. But you just go and report your murder. No-one will be in the least bit interested."

"What are you talking about?"

"No murder was committed here, Doctor McCoy."

"I just saw you kill Mr Spock. That's murder in anyone's book."

"You just saw me shoot at a machine. Another machine happened to get in the way. I warned him. You needn't worry. It's not as though he felt anything. He was a Vulcan. As far as this planet's concerned he didn't exist. That's why we were surprised to see him. Vulcans know they're persona non grata as far as Indus II is concerned."

"But Spock's only half-Vulcan, and even if he were full Vulcan he's still a sentient being. He still has a right to live."

"The half-Vulcan bit worried us at first too, but we tested him. He failed all the tests. He came out pure machine. Just like a full Vulcan would. You can't murder a machine, Doctor. Vulcans have no rights under Indus law. He never existed, so it was impossible to murder him."

"But he's a Starfleet officer."

"He gave up his rights the moment he set foot on the planet. He knew that."

"How could he know?"

"It's all written down in our constitution. He confirmed himself that he'd read it. Our founder father set up this place after he'd encountered the Vulcans and he made sure that such unfeeling morons would have no rights on this world. We've set up a better society where people count, where feelings count. His kind has no place in it."

"His kind?" I was beside myself. "You're talking about a man."

"Yet you yourself called him nothing more than a set of printed circuits."

"Yes, I called him that. But with all his lack of feelings he was head and shoulders above you. You see, he may never show a decent Human emotion, but he had one saving grace. He, and all his people, respect life. I've not known him long, but I've seen him risk his life to save the life of a creature intent on killing him. For that matter he risked his life coming here to try and save the lives of the people on your planet, people who thought of him as a mere machine. Now I understand what he meant when he said he wasn't keen on the legal system of this planet. If only he'd explained properly the Captain would never have let him come here. Now you get the hell out of my sight. If you try to touch him I'll kill you. I'm too late to save his life, but I'm not too late to save his dignity, and Vulcans set store by dignity. His body will be returned to his people intact - and you'll answer to Captain Kirk."

"I'll answer to no-one. This planet has its own laws and you agreed to them by coming here."

"Just get out of here!" I yelled. He took one look at my face and he disappeared.

I moved over to Spock's unmoving body and covered my face with my hands.

"My God, Spock. I'm sorry. You *told* me not to bring that biocomp. You *told* me you didn't like the legal system on this stupid planet. Why didn't I listen to you? Why didn't I let you explain? Your life's worth more than some dumb machine. Why did you let him kill you for a stupid piece of metal? What logic could there be in that? I guess I'll never know."

I thought I was dreaming when a whisper of a voice broke into my self-recriminations.

"Perhaps I can enlighten you?"

I stared at his body, not believing my ears. Then I got out my medical scanner. He didn't say anything else. He didn't move. He didn't even raise an eyebrow. But the readings proved he was alive. They were low - extremely low - but they were there.

"Impossible. That phaser was set on kill and Bladen said it only took a 30 second blast to kill someone."

"To kill a Human. I am Vulcan."

"You were pretty nearly one dead Vulcan! Just lie still and let me examine you properly."

This time I got the raised eyebrow. "I was not planning to leave."

Was that a joke? I knew in that moment that I'd never truly understand the being known as Spock. Jim's words came to mind. He'd described the Vulcan as gentle, with a warm sense of humour. I'd told him he must be talking about someone entirely different. Now I wasn't so sure. Spock had come to this planet knowing he was not welcome. Why? Possibly because Jim had ordered him. That in itself would be an act of loyalty to a man, not to Starfleet. There were regulations protecting Federation members from situations known to be dangerous. Situations just like walking onto a planet that refuses to acknowledge your existence. No wonder he'd argued the point with Jim. But I knew he wouldn't have put the whole case or Jim would never have let him come. Possibly it was to save lives. I had been speaking the truth when I said Spock was the best Science Officer I'd ever seen. He was head and shoulders above anyone I'd ever met before. Up until this point, that had been his only saving grace in my book. Vulcans respected life. All life. Spock had risked his before to save another. There were hundreds of lives at risk here. He went up several notches in my estimation.

While I thought I continued my examination. His breathing was shallow and on the fast side. His pupils were contracted, probably in pain, although he gave no other sign of it. What bothered me most was his lack of reaction when I touched him, and the cold feel to his limbs. Spock was usually hot to touch. Clearly he was suffering from the phaser blast. On the other hand, it was incredible that he was still alive.

"Do you think you could make it over to my bed if I assisted you?"

"No."

Was there something I had missed? Spock hadn't even offered to try. There's nothing like getting an answer straight from the horse's mouth.

"Why not?"

"I cannot move my limbs."

"What? None of them?"

"Correct."

"It must be the phaser. Okay, how about if I move you onto a blanket and pull you across?"

"As you wish. For what purpose?"

"Look, if Bladen comes back I want to have you in a position where he won't think to question my actions. If he finds out you're alive he'll probably try to finish off what he started. I'll get you onto the bed, then I can cover you with a sheet if he comes in, and tell him to get away from you if he tries to approach. Then later I'll get Dr Sanchez to help me and we can transfer you to the shuttle. You should be safe there until we leave this ... place."

"No."

"What?"

"I must remain."

"You've got to be kidding. Bladen will kill you for sure. You've got to get out of here as fast as possible."

"I am needed."

"What good can you do now, Spock? They'll never let you help. You'll only risk your neck for nothing."

"Can you manufacture the serum without the biocomp?"

I stared at him, a sinking feeling in my heart.

"No wonder you tried to stop him! Oh my. In trying to kill you he killed the last chance these people have of finding a cure. We were so close. All for nothing. Without the biocomp I'll never be able to find an antidote."

"I can do the necessary calculations in my head. I have memorised all the information in the biocomp up until the last two screens."

"So that's what you were doing when you were punching things into the damn thing! I thought you were crazy."

"Indeed!"

I couldn't quite meet his eyes. There was considerable reproach there, and I realised how weak he was in that I could read it. I also realised that Jim Kirk had been right. Inside this man's machine facade was a complex, sentient being. I'd not been quite as bad as Bladen, but I was beginning to think I'd been nearer to him than to Jim in my approach to Spock.

"How long will it take?"

"Unknown." His eyes dropped away, towards the wall. "I do not seem to have full control."

"It's probably the phaser's effects, Spock. That will pass in time. I can give you something to help."

"No. I cannot risk it. I must continue the calculations while I am able. I do not know if my memory will survive a period of unconsciousness. It is not responding as it should."

Now I was really alarmed. I'd never understood Spock's mental state. After all, he was a Vulcan. But for him to admit to problems mentally meant he was in real trouble.

"What can I do?"

"As you suggest, I shall be less at risk if I am out of sight. I recommend the blanket."

Well, I got the blanket and managed to push and shove him onto it. It took some doing - he weighs more than you'd give him credit for. He wasn't much help, either. He'd spoken only the truth when he'd said he wasn't able to move. I had to do all the work. I was huffing and puffing by the time I'd pulled him onto the blanket. Then I had to haul him across the room. I stopped when I got there. It was all very well, but I didn't see how I was going to manoeuvre him from the floor to the bed. In the end I did it by lifting him in the blanket, using it rather like a sling, and dropped him unceremoniously on top of the bed. I was only just in time. There was a knock at the door. I slung a sheet over him and went to answer it. It was Bladen.

"Doc, look, I don't suppose you understand?"

"No."

"Well, we've learned not to trust machines. I'm not sorry I killed him, but I don't want it to interfere with our relationship. You will still help us, won't you?"

"What do you think he was trying to do?"

"If you like, I'll help you bury him."

"You'll do no such thing. You'll stay well away from him. Do you hear? I intend to take him back on board the Enterprise, where there will be friends waiting for him."

"Friends? For a machine?"

"Yes, friends. I'll admit I'm not one of them, but he does ... did ... have friends. The Captain for one. So you'd best leave. And I don't want you or your fellow Indians, or whatever you call yourselves, coming anywhere near him. I'm going to have to do a lot of work to try and find a cure. Without him and without the biocomp it will be almost impossible. So let me get on with it."

"He shouldn't have brought the biocomp."

"He didn't. I did. He warned me not to bring it. Now get out!"

"Okay, Doc. I'll make sure you're left alone. But he ain't worth it."

"Go!"

He went, good riddance! Perhaps I over-egged the leave me alone bit, but it seemed to work. The next few days I was left completely alone. It was a good thing too.

I was absorbed in my work when my thoughts were interrupted by a soft groan. It took me a couple of seconds to realise it was Spock. I'd never heard him make a sound like it. When I understood I rushed to his side.

His eyes reflected such pain that they left me hurting in sympathy.

"Spock? Spock? What is it?"

My mediscanner showed me nothing. I wondered if it was working. He seemed to focus on me from a long distance, but when he looked at me directly the pain had gone - or at least I couldn't see it. It didn't make sense.

"You're in pain," I said. "Let me give you something for it. At least tell me what's causing it."

Those eyes pinned me down again. A part of me wanted to escape, another part told me that if I looked away now I'd lose whatever respect this man still had for me. I waited him out. It was the longest few minutes of my life. It was worth it.

"Logically I cannot waste energy on controlling my body if I am to concentrate on calculating the formula for the antidote. Forgive me."

Forgive him? For what? Blast his Vulcan pride - if that was what it was.

"Spock, as far as I'm concerned you can moan as much as you like. I won't think any the worse of you for it." Then I realised what was really troubling him. "And I won't tell anyone about it. I promise."

His eyes caught mine again, only this time he nodded. Why he should accept my word after the way I'd treated him I didn't know, but his acceptance was the start of something between us. It's never been an easy relationship, but from that moment onwards we've tried to understand each other. Somewhere along the way that attempt changed to true friendship. He'd be as reluctant as me to discuss that. That's a fact.

Anyway, I digress. Having given up on the mediscanner, I decided to check him out the old-fashioned way. That's when I came across the burn marks. Burn marks? Nothing had happened since we'd been on this planet that could have caused first-degree burns. But the evidence before my eyes was clear. Spock's right arm had blistered from the heat. The blisters had burst and had partly turned septic. The whole mess stretched right across his forearm. It had not been treated.

Spock had returned to his calculations. The pain showed again in his eyes, and I couldn't quite look directly at them. I wanted to call him back to explain the burns, but I'd already realised that it had cost him dearly to focus on me the first time. He obviously needed his strength to do the mental calculations. I didn't intend to make it harder for him.

So I took his arm and I cleaned the wound. Then I applied a layer of mediskin. As I worked I considered how he could have received the burns. They were rather localised to have been a big fire. A bunsen burner seemed likely, but Spock was too careful to have burned

himself like that. Why hadn't he had the thing treated? It looked several days old. I shook my head.

I'm not sure what made me check further, but having found the burn I proceeded to check the rest of him out. A good thing too. Spock had three broken ribs, bruises the like of which I'd never seen before across his lower abdomen well below the belt, and a deep cut on his upper right arm that could only have been made by a knife. There was only one explanation. The welcome committee. Bladen's own words came back to me. 'The half-Vulcan bit worried us at first too, but we tested him. He failed ...' How could I have been so blind? I'd as good as told Spock to ignore what had happened. No wonder he hadn't come to me for help. Dr Sanchez had been right. Spock probably had been sick, but he hadn't been willing to admit it to me. Who could blame him? All the time we'd been on this God-forsaken planet he'd been suffering alone, trying to help the inhabitants while they didn't even recognise his existence - and while his crewmates had no idea what was going on. While an all-too-Human doctor failed to recognise that he was in pain.

Spock had obviously tampered with my mediscanner to keep the truth from me. That should have made me feel better, but it didn't. Now I knew the truth I went to work with a will. I was able to deal with all the lacerations at a superficial level. He only groaned again once the whole time. I marvelled at his control, while blaming it for his ability to fool me all this time.

His skin was still cold to my touch, so I also set about covering him with an extra blanket and then the sheet. I needed that in case Bladen came back.

Bladen left me alone, however, and I spent the whole two days watching over Spock, except for the times I went out into the ward and checked my other patients. My hopes lay with the Vulcan as more people died. Dr Sanchez asked why I spent so much time away from the ward, so I told him I was working on the antidote and thought a break-through seemed possible. He obviously didn't know about Spock. Bladen hadn't considered him worth mentioning. Ironically that made my task easier.

In those two days I heard Spock groan again twice more. The first time he'd somehow managed to reopen the burn wounds I'd taken so long sealing with plastiskin. The second time he'd shifted position sufficiently to dislodge a rib, but I managed to ease him back without calling him away from those all-important calculations. More lives were at stake here than I cared to contemplate.

I was aware that he hadn't slept all this time, and his readings were still terribly weak. I still hadn't figured out what he'd done to the scanner with respect to individual readings. The stupid thing wouldn't work properly, but it continued to monitor overall readings and they weren't too healthy. My hopes rested on him.

I wasn't disappointed. On the third morning, while I was taking his pulse for the umpteenth time, he blinked twice and then said in a clinically cold voice, "I have the formula, Doctor."

It was all I could do to stop myself shouting 'Eureka!' and hugging him, despite that coldness. I managed to restrain myself and restricted my response to "You son of a gun!"

"I assure you there was no Mr Gun among my ancestors."

I set to work on preparing the antidote immediately. We still had to be sure it would work on a Human being, but it was the only chance we had against the disease. In my haste I

forgot all about Spock. I worked all day on the liquid. It was three in the afternoon when I finally had the thing in a suitable form to give to a patient. I had nothing to lose. They'd die anyway if this didn't work. As I turned from the bench, vial in hand, I realised that Spock was not moving. I rushed over to him. He was still breathing, but more shallowly than ever. Nor was the sound even any more. Every fifth or sixth breath came as though it was fighting a restriction. There was a film of sweat over his skin.

I was torn between the vial in my hand and the Vulcan. Whichever way I moved someone was likely to die. In the end I settled for what Spock later called the logical answer - I called Dr Sanchez and got him to administer the serum, then I returned to Spock's side. This time I gave him every shot I could think of. After all, he didn't need to concentrate on calculations any more. Again I cursed myself for thinking of the colonists before Spock. I should have seen to him before I started work on the antidote. Spock didn't agree when I admitted this to him later. It was logical to cater for the needs of the colonists when they were many and he but one. I don't think I'll ever get used to that logic.

Anyhow, to cut a long story short, the antidote worked. Bladen was so delighted that he even agreed to my having Spock's body taken to the shuttle by Enterprise personnel. It was a good thing as he had been unconscious since I stuffed him full of drugs, and he groaned again en route to the shuttle. The four people carrying him all managed to cover their surprise at a talking corpse and we were able to leave Indus II almost all in one piece.

I got the brunt of Jim's anger when we returned, as Spock wasn't in a fit state to make a full report. I almost welcomed it as I felt so bad.

He sensed that and said to me, "There's nothing I can tell you that you haven't told yourself, is there, Bones?"

I shook my head in agreement. He was right. Jim smiled then, and led me over to the bed where Spock still lay in intensive care.

"I can't really blame you, Bones. I'm as much at fault. He tried to tell me about the legal system when we got their request for help, but I cut him off. It seemed so unimportant in the middle of a medical crisis. I should have known better. Spock rarely says anything at all, so I should have known there was a reason for his referring to the legal system. No wonder he seemed surprised they'd requested his presence. I just can't believe any planet could be so short sighted. Nor can I understand how they could subject anyone to that kind of testing. It's inhuman. Starfleet Command will get a full report from me and I suspect Indus II will be refused membership of the Federation."

"I don't think Spock would want that, Jim. Otherwise his sacrifices will be in vain."

"What do you mean?"

"He could have discredited Bladen and his men at any time. He knew the Enterprise personnel would back him. He chose not to make an issue of it. I don't think he'd want you to."

"You mean you think I should drop the issue?"

"No. I think you should take it up with Indus II, not the Federation. Now Spock's safe aboard you could tell them the truth and how much he risked to save them. I'm not sure it would influence Bladen any, but there were folks in that hospital who met Spock and might see the truth. I think you owe Spock that much."

So that's what we did. Spock didn't exactly say thank you when he recovered, but I knew he appreciated the gesture when he called it 'logical'. There was a partial exodus from Indus II shortly afterwards and an alternative colony was set up on Indus III. Their legal system was identical, except for the reference to Vulcans and other aliens. It was a step in the right direction.

As my memories came full circle Spock opened his eyes. I was sufficiently practised at watching him to recognise the tiny indicators of pain - a slight tension in the creases around his eyes, an almost undetectable narrowing of those black pupils. His first words were, "The Captain?"

I grinned. "He's fine, Spock. At least, he's gone with Tracey and has promised to co-operate on pain of our deaths."

"He should not compromise his position on our behalf."

"I don't think he will. He's just playing for time. Now, how do you feel?" He opened his mouth, but before he could get the words out I added, "And if you say 'Functional', so help me I'll kill you myself."

He raised an eyebrow and considered me critically. I went on, "You know, Spock, I've been thinking about the last time I saw you downed with a phaser set to kill. I don't think I could go through that again. How are you, really?"

He sighed. It was just the releasing of a pent up breath, and I almost didn't catch the gentle sound.

"I am weak, Doctor, but not in difficulty. I believe I shall survive until we are able to return home."

I smiled then. "Don't you worry, Spock. We'll get home all right. Jim's bound to find a way round Tracey. Of course, he might need a little help from us."

So saying I helped Spock to sit up. He really was weak. However, he accepted my help without comment. We'd come a long way from Indus II.



Recently, zine sales have been dropping. There are a number of possible reasons - the amount of professional material available nowadays (zines began in the days when there was no other written material available); the availability of videos (zines began when there were no videos; if Trek was not on TV, you had no way of seeing it); the possibility that people who are new to fandom assume that "amateur production" automatically means poor quality (regular zine readers know that is not the case - most fan writing is of extremely high quality); or, in these days of recession, price. It's an unfortunate fact of life that small print runs of anything cost far more than big print runs, and zines have always been small-run publications.

We believe that interest in fan-written stories is still there, but that a lot of fans no longer have the spare cash to buy many zines. In an attempt to resolve this and return zines to a more affordable price, we have decided to put out several issues in A5 format. This does mean a reduction in the size of the print (unless we were to reduce, rather drastically, the number of words per zine) because A5 is 73% of the size of A4, but almost halves the price of the zine.

We do however need feedback. Please let us know what you think of this new format. Do you prefer this size? Do you find it easy enough to read the reduced print? And if you don't like this presentation, can you come up with a viable alternative which lets us put out the same word count at a comparable price?

You can send your comments to Sheila Clark, 6 Craigmill Cottages, Strathmartine, by Dundee DD3 0PH, Janet Quarton, 15 Letter Daill, Cairnbaan, Lochgilphead, Argyll, or Valerie Piacentini, 20 Ardrossan Rd, Saltcoats, Ayrshire.



